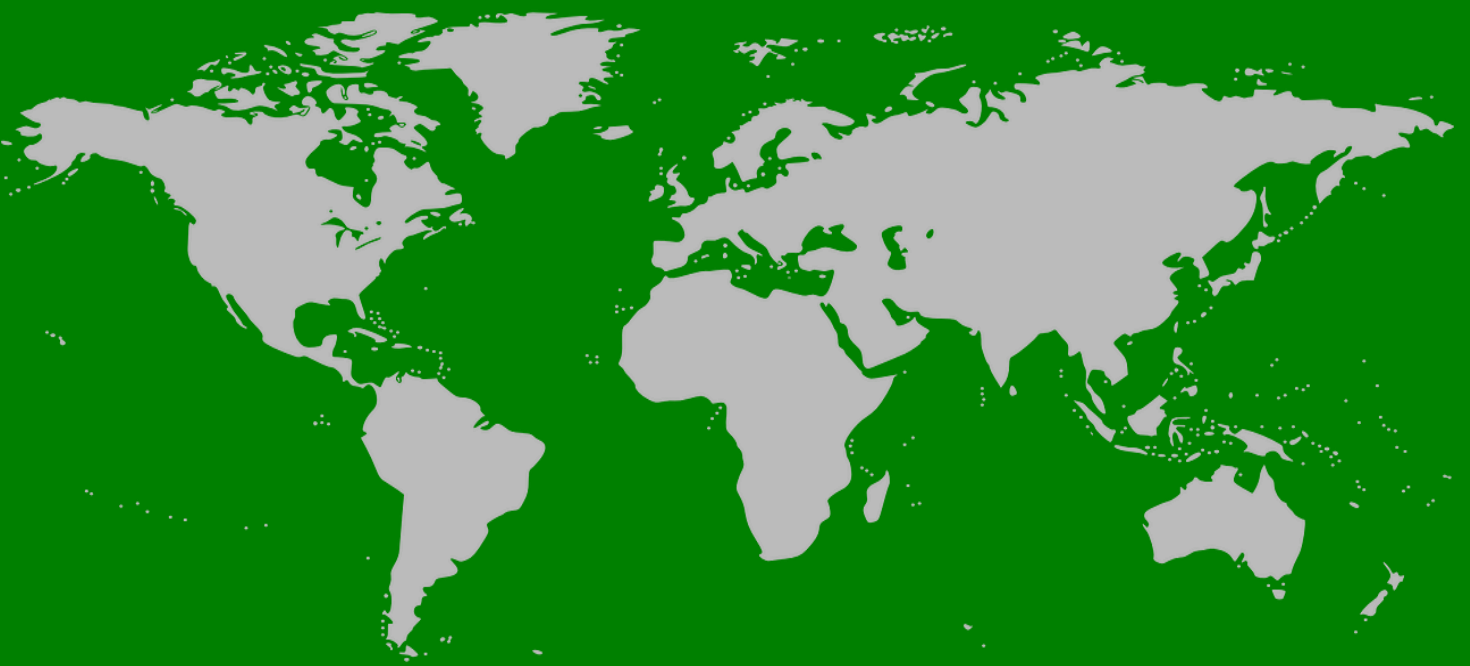


*“Discovering international relations
and contemporary global issues”*

Cultural Relations Policy
News & Background



ISSUE #61
ICRP Monthly Review Series 2017



6/2017



About CRP News & Background

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

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



ISSUE #61  **6/2017**
ICRP Monthly Review Series 2017

Editorial Team

Series Editor | Csilla Morauszki

Authors – June 2017 | Nicole Gefvenberg, Megan Rogers, Mustafa Yenel, Aysun Yıldız,
Tamar Buachidze, Boglárka Judit Ruzs, Lisa Maria Kuke,

Executive Publisher | Andras Lorincz

© **Institute for Cultural Relations Policy**

Kulturalis Kapcsolatokert Alapitvany

45 Gyongyosi utca, Budapest 1031 – Hungary

ISSN 2063-8205

Content



- 1** United Nations Security Council election
- 2** Montenegro officially joins NATO
- 3** Ukraine initiates an offensive against Nord Stream II
- 5** Gazan's protest on border with Israel
- 6** Civilians flee across the frontline near Mosul
- 7** Terrorist attacks in Iran's capital Tehran
- 8** Qatar in diplomatic crisis
- 10** Yemen crisis continues
- 12** Humanitarian crisis continues in DR Congo
- 13** Kazakhstan hosts the World Expo 2017
- 13** Kazakhstan hosts the World Expo 2017
- 14** Marawi conflict continues
- 15** Australian government declares gun amnesty
- 16** United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement
- 17** Former FBI Director against President Trump
- 18** President Trump announces MS-13 are to be deported
- 19** Crisis in Venezuela
- 20** News in brief

United Nations Security Council election

Boglárka Judit Rusz ■



United Nations Security Council in the United Nations Headquarters in New York City.
Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

■ During the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly, on 2 June 2017 the new, five non-permanent members were elected to serve terms of two years each in the UN Security Council. These members, ensuring the geographical representation are Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, Poland and Peru. The (new) members of the Security Council are dedicated to maintain international peace and security with the help of legally binding decisions, with the help of power to

impose sanctions and authorise the use of force. Besides the regular election there was a by-election for one seat for the Western European and Other Group. This by-election was held in an uneven numbered years because two-year term has been split between two countries. In 2016 after the deadlocked voting (five inconclusive rounds of balloting, in the fifth round each both the Netherlands and Italy were tied with 95 votes) the United Nations General Assembly elected Italy with 179 in favour, although Italy has pledged to step down after one year to allow the Netherlands to be elected to the council by the 193-member General Assembly for 2018.

The way and the results of the election suggest to challenge not just the system of Security Council but also the system of the UN because this election system gave only one year for two members to make an impact on their priority issues in a Council dominated by its permanent members and gave two years for a country to maintain the international peace and security that has harassed human rights.



Montenegro officially joins NATO

Nicole Gefvenberg ■

■ In an act that has divided its citizens, Montenegro has formally joined NATO's ranks as the alliance's 29th member in a ceremony held at the US State Department in Washington. Prime Minister Dusko Markovic and Foreign Minister Srdjan Darmanovic officially handed over the accession papers to undersecretary of state Thomas Shannon on June 5th, formalising Montenegro's membership.

Having been formally invited by NATO already in 2015, the country has already participated in a Brussels meeting as a full member despite not having been formally accepted at the time. However, the decision to join NATO strikes at the heart of the divisions in the country. It was only 18 years ago that NATO's air force performed a bombing campaign in Montenegro to drive out Slobodan Milosevic's troops from Kosovo, as Montenegro was at the time part of a republic with Serbia. This recent history is still a potent memory for many Montenegrins, as shown by the evenly divided polling results on NATO membership.

The decision has also been contested by the alliance of parties opposing NATO membership, the Democratic Front, who are flying a Russian flag from their headquarters in the capital city Podgorica in a vehement opposition campaign, as well as by the bigger shadow of Montenegro's Slavic neighbour, Russia. The stakes of this deep seated conflict in Montenegro are nothing but high – shown by

for example the charges against the leadership of the Democratic Front in February for ostensibly planning a coup with Russian connections against the then Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic.

The coup attempt, which would have killed Djukanovic and several members of parliament, was foiled and is generally considered Russia's last aggressive move to influence Montenegro's politics, certainly showing its unwillingness to cede Montenegro.

Markovic addressed this pull between east and west in saying "it is a historic event for a country and a nation which endured enormous sacrifices in the 19th and 20th centuries in order to defend their right to a free life, the right to decide our own future, recognised by the world under our own name, and with our own national symbols". However, the struggle is far from over, as there are possibilities for more unrest while the investigation of the coup may turn into a political crisis, not least because the Montenegrin High Court have linked it to Russian intelligence officers.

Now that Montenegro has turned to NATO, Putin's meeting with Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic in the same week to sign the first arms treaty between the two countries since 2013 indicates Serbia will become the "main Russian hope in the Western Balkans", according to director of the Russian International Affairs Council Andrei Kortunov.



Ukraine initiates an offensive against Nord Stream II: US and Europe at economic odds

Megan Rogers ■

■ In a distinct break from Europe Ukraine has formally established an offensive against the Russian-backed Baltic Sea pipeline, Nord Stream II, in a move which strikes an unusual alliance with Washington.



Prime Minister Vladimir Putin held negotiations with Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko in Moscow, following which Gazprom and Naftogaz Ukraine signed a contract for the sale and purchase of natural gas for 2009-2019. Photo: Government.ru

This modern energy alliance between Europe and Russia has determined a strange reality in that Europe and the US are for once pitted at odds and Europe are pandering for a lenient hand to be dealt to Russia, at least economically, through allegiance to Nord Stream II whilst raising a hand in recognition to Russia's energy dominance on the continent.

This essentially economic dispute between the US, Ukraine, Russia, and now much of Western

Europe can be traced to two major European energy companies – Russian-run Gazprom and Ukrainian State controlled Naftogaz. Naftogaz is considered to be the berth of the Russian gas fields and the European market as although the gas which flows is Russian, the transit pipelines are Ukrainian-owned.

In June 2015, Gazprom announced a large-scale plan to introduce a secondary pipeline alongside the existing major line Nord Stream I. Although there was some initial hesitation from major Western European players on the back of “Russian Dominance” accusations, Britain, France, Germany and Austria joined the project dividing European sentiment towards the pipeline in an almost East versus West dispute (the US obviously and always conceptually opposed).

The intention to build a secondary pipeline was considered by Ukrainian officials to be a move that would serve a coup de grâce to Naftogaz; thereby stripping Ukraine of much-needed income as well as their geopolitical stronghold as the essential facilitator of Russian energy to Europe.

June 14th 2017 saw the US Senate provisionally adopt a law extending sanctions on Russian



energy companies extraterritorially in a landslide vote of 97 to 2. The new law, if formally officiated, will give the President authority to penalise energy companies in relations with Russian companies under sanctions – Gazprom and therefore Nord Stream II.

Major financiers of the pipeline, most notably those energy companies headquartering in Germany and Austria, were quick to condemn the proposition of sanctions by the US Senate, branding the threats as “unacceptable” and calling-out the US for seemingly using foreign policy interests to meddle in European economic affairs.

It remains unclear whether other major financiers will pull-out of the project in the wake of the threats. An inevitable waiting game and a dependence on the market perception of any resulting concrete measures will certainly force energy companies to weigh-up the pros and cons of abandoning a project where major capital has already been invested.



Vladimir Putin at gala evening celebrating Gazprom's 20th anniversary.
Photo: Putin.kremlin.ru

However, it seems unlikely that a crucial pipeline ideologically backed, and financially if needs be, by the Kremlin will not go ahead exactly as originally intended by Gazprom.

“the intention to build a secondary pipeline was considered by Ukrainian officials to be a move that would serve a coup de grâce to Naftogaz”



Gazan's protest on border with Israel amidst worsening energy crisis

Megan Rogers ■

■ The long-established sectarian conflict between Israel and Palestine has left the residents of Egypt-Israel-bordering Gaza on the brink of a humanitarian crisis. Initiated in 2006, recent events have demonstrated an undeniable escalation in how Israel's monopoly on energy is continuing to be utilised as a tactic for political aggravation on both sides of the field – with Gaza as fodder.

On the evening of Friday 16 June the candles of hundreds of Palestinians were alight in protest on the Israeli border on the back of what must be branded an exacerbating electricity and fuel crisis, forcing crucial local emergency services and public health institutions to rely on precariously fuelled generators or be plunged into darkness.

These protests follow the decision by Israel's security cabinet on Monday July 12 to shorten the daily average of energy received by Gaza's some two million residents dependent on the Israeli supplied power grid to just 3 hours. This comes as a counter move to the Palestinian Authority's President Mahmoud Abbas' provocative termination of vital electricity funding to the territory in an attempt to put pressure on Hamas' de facto control of Gaza's Strip.

A number of human rights and humanitarian organisations have raised concerns regarding Israel's targeting of Gazan's as political apparatus with which to bring about a diminishment in Palestinian violence in southern Israel. Many have denounced the use of energy warfare, pointing out that the cuts have a major inhumane effect on the lives of civilians detached from Palestinian armed groups undertaking the violence.

Human Rights Watch issued a statement determining that "cutting fuel or electricity to the civilian population violates a basic principle of international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, which prohibit a government that has effective control over a territory from attacking or withholding objects that are essential to the survival of the civilian population. Such an act would also violate Israel's duty as an occupying power to safeguard the health and welfare of the population under occupation."

UN coordinators for the Middle East Peace Process continue to attempt to open lines of communication between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli energy authority in Gaza in a bid to broker a peace deal which might see an end to the disarray experienced by civilians bearing the brunt of the wider conflict at hand.



Civilians flee across the frontline near Mosul

Megan Rogers ■

■ Hundreds of Mosul civilians from neighbourhoods liberated from IS militants continue to flee across the front lines beneath the thin veil of security blanketed by the Iraqi Counter Terrorist Services (CTS), intent on leaving behind impoverished conditions devoid of water, food and access to health services.

On the morning of Wednesday 18 June US and British backed Iraqi CTS advanced toward a lasting Isil stronghold at the Mosul mosque. According to a military statement, as counter forces pushed to within 50 meters Isil militants blew up the mosque with explosives in a last attempt to deter the offensive.

Muslims globally mourned the destruction of the Grand Mosque of al-Nouri, built in the 12th Century and a treasured religious heritage site. The Mosque was seized in 2014 by the jihadists and is thought to have hosted the first and only public appearance of Isil Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdad when he declared his own “new caliphate” on June 29.



Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul after retaking from ISIS.
Photo: Tasnim News [Wikimedia Commons]

17 June saw Iraqi Prime Minister Hailer al-Abadi declare the end of the Islamic State’s caliphate in light of the mosque’s destruction, branding the explosion a “formal declaration of defeat”.

However, Commanders amongst the Iraqi forces warn that IS Militants and suicide fighters positioned amongst large civilian groups, disguising themselves amongst those “fleeing” the devastation, continue to pose an enormous threat which ensures that the ensuing battle will remain as challenging as ever.



Terrorist attacks in Iran's capital Tehran

Mustafa Yenel ■

■ On 7 June 2017, two terrorist attacks were simultaneously carried out by five terrorists against the Iranian Parliament building and the Mausoleum of Ruhollah Khomeini in Tehran, Iran. 17 people dead and 43 others wounded. These attacks were the first terrorist attacks in Tehran in more than a decade. The first major terror attacks in the country following the 2010 Zahedan bombings.



President Hassan Rouhani provides a tribute to the victims during the 9 June 2017 funeral.
Photo: Tasnim News [Wikimedia Commons]

Attackers have targeted the two most important national symbols of Iran, they were armed and suicide bombers. “Wednesday’s attack on the national parliament and the shrine of the Islamic Republic’s founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

were ‘unprecedented’ actions against state institutions in recent years, and it could reverberate across the Middle East,” said Reza Khaasteh, a journalist of the Tehran-based Iran Front Page. “We did not have any similar attack in Iran for a long time,” Khaasteh told Al Jazeera. “This one is like those that happened in Europe.” All attackers were killed by security forces. Iran’s intelligence minister also said that the mastermind behind the attacks in Tehran, which killed 17 people, had been killed by security forces. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) group had claimed responsibility for the attack, by suicide bombers and gunmen.

After the deadly attacks, Iran has arrested almost 50 people in connection with simultaneous attacks in Tehran. Six people who were certainly connected to Wednesday’s terrorist attacks in Tehran were identified and arrested and Iran’s intelligence minister Mahmoud Alavi said that 43 suspects had been arrested and operations to identify and crush more “terrorist cells” were under way.



Qatar in diplomatic crisis

Nicole Gefvenberg ■

■ In the Middle East's worst diplomatic crisis in years, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt completely severed relations with Qatar in the early hours of June 5th, diplomatically isolating the small peninsula of 2.4 million people. The blockade included launching an embargo, closing land, sea and air borders, calling home all their residents in Qatar and giving Qatar's diplomatic missions 48 hours to leave their countries.

The four countries have attributed this action to concerns for the security of their nations, accusing Qatar of supporting terrorism and interfering in the internal affairs of GCC countries, in practise referring to Qatar's support of the Muslim Brotherhood. The GCC, the Gulf Cooperation Council, is an economic and political alliance between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain with the aim of fostering cooperation in the region and between its members. The exact accusations have not been released to the public.

While relations between the Gulf States have always been tense, this breakdown of relations sets a new level. As a part of the struggle for regional leadership, tensions have lately been growing as Qatar has supported Islamist governments post Arab Spring as well as tightening relations with Iran, much to the dismay of Saudi Arabia in particular. As is typical of Gulf relations, Saudi Arabia and Iran are

fiercely competing for regional influence in multiple proxy wars and have no formal relations. Saudi Arabia is a conservative Sunni Islamic monarchy with ties to the West and Iran a Shia Islamic Republic closer to China and Russia.

The current row was triggered on May 23rd when Al-Jazeera was reportedly hacked and aired a supposedly false bulletin about Qatar's Emir's views on Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia. In the bulletin, Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani pledged support to Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran and criticised the US. The second leak was an announcement of Qatar's intentions to withdraw its ambassadors from the Bahrain, the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia due to a conspiracy.

These news aired in numerous Gulf States, who rejected Qatari officials' insistence that the Emir's remarks were fake and launched the blockade. It is of note that the views put forward in the hacking are more or less what has been understood as Qatar's foreign policies.

Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani commented "we do not support terrorism, we do not interfere in the internal affairs of our neighbours, and we are not secret allies of Iran".

A further complication of the situation is that Qatar is home to the US's greatest airbase in the region, which happens to be the main launch



site for the coalition against ISIS. The American response has been somewhat mixed, with President Donald Trump condoning the blockade in a tweet while the secretary of state and secretary of defence, Rex Tillerson and James Mattis, emphasised that this diplomatic row was not conducive to the fight against ISIS or general terrorism.

The blockade is taking a toll on global banks, businesses and people in the region. The blockade and closing of borders prompted Qatar's residents to take to the supermarkets to stock up on food. Qatar's only land border is Saudi Arabia to the north, and with air and sea ways also being affected there is a supply issue. However, Qatar is still able to ship goods the seaway, being the biggest producer of liquefied natural gas in the world and also an oil producer, although the Gulf States are some of its biggest trading partners.

In late June when the blockade had been going on for three weeks, Kuwait presented Qatar with an ultimatum of 13 demands to stop the blockade on behalf of the Saudi led bloc, including shutting down Al Jazeera, removing Turkish troops from Qatar, diminish contact with Iran and cut all links with Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood. Doha was given ten days to respond. The conditions were arguably harsh, as Tillerson stated they may be "difficult for Qatar to meet" and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called them "a breach to Qatar's sovereign rights".

As of 30th of June, Yemen, the Eastern Government of Libya, the Maldives, Mauritania, Senegal and Comoros have also severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, while Jordan, Chad, Niger and Djibouti have scaled down their interactions with the country.

Currently it is impossible to say how long this diplomatic severing will remain in place, or exactly how it will affect the regional relations in the Gulf. UAE Minister for foreign affairs Anwar Gargash said "the alternative is not escalation, the alternative is parting of ways", showing neither side seems to be willing to back down, or even sit down and talk as well as suggesting Qatar may be expelled from the GCC.

Abdullah al-Muhanadi, from the public sector in Doha, commented "the agreement with Turkey is a long-standing diplomatic agreement so we cannot ask them to leave", which underscores the dilemma created between the four states' refusal to back down after what they describe as years of Qatari interference and the fact that Qatar may simply be unable to comply with all 13 infringing demands.

Given all parties' unwillingness to compromise or negotiate, there is quite possible that this conflict may continue for years rather than months. The difference is that the four states have time on their side, while the blockade may destabilise Qatar.



Yemen crisis continues

Boglárka Judit Rusz ■

■ The political transition, which was supposed to bring stability and prosperity to the country and which has finished in failure and the long-years war among the Houthis, the governments, the tribes and the terrorists have triggered a humanitarian disaster in one of the poorest Arab world's country, in Yemen.

In that backward country the problems started with the Houthis (or in other words, the Supporters, Partisans of God. They are the followers of a predominantly Zaydi Shia-led religious-political movement, which started as a gathering called the „Believing Youth Forum in the early nineties) during the long-time authoritarian presidency of Ali Abdullah Saleh and from the year of 2004 the Houthis is intermittently fighting with the Yemini government.

The situation became more serious when the group was capitalising on widespread frustration to gain more power in the country after the unsuccessful Arab Spring and when they started to occupy the southern territories. At the end, in 2014, the Houthis with the support of many ordinary Sunnis Yemenis entered Sanaa and after five months, in January 2015 they reinforced the takeover of the capital with the occupation of the surrounding presidential place

and other key points. During the house arrest of government, the president, Hadi was able to escape from Yemen the Houthis wanted to push their advantage and to take control the entire country.



*Aerial bombardments on Sana'a, Yemen in March 2016.
Photo: fahd sadi [Wikimedia Commons]*

That was the turning point where the nine mostly Sunni Arab states with the support of American, British and French intelligence agencies established a coalition aimed at restoring Hadi's government. The coalition with naval blockade, air campaign and landed ground troops in Aden, the soldiers loyal to President Hadi, the predominantly Sunni southern tribesmen and the separatists successfully stopped the Houthis' occupation in the southern part of the country, although the northern part



of the country, including Sanaa and its surroundings, is under the Houthis' control. Meanwhile the pro- and anti-government forces are fighting, the civilians are suffering and the supporters of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State are taking advantage of the chaos.



Yemen.

Map: Gerald J. Coleman [Wikimedia Commons]

This chaotic situation was characterised by Jamie McGoldrick as follows: “The politics of the situation has overcome the humanity. The humanity does not work anymore here. The world has turned a blind eye to what is happening in Yemen...”

The testimonies of the civilians’ suffering are frightening. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 20.7 million people in Yemen need some kind of humanitarian or protection support, with some 9.8 million in acute need of assistance, 17 million people are considered food insecure and 6.8 million severely food insecure, about 3.3 million children and pregnant or breast-feeding women are acutely malnourished, including 462,000 children under five who face severe acute malnutrition, 19.4 million people without access to safe drinking water or sanitation, about 11.3 million people need assistance to protect their safety, dignity or basic rights.

This man-made chaos have also pushed Yemen everyday deeper and deeper – at least three million people have fled their homes, public services have broken down, less than half of the health centres are functional, medicine and equipment are limited, and there are a lack of doctors and the epidemics such as cholera has compounded the situation.

Now, it is time open the closed eyes because Yemen reached its limits and there is no humanitarian response which can meet the increasing needs of that war.

“20.7 million people in Yemen need some kind of humanitarian or protection support”



Humanitarian crisis continues in Democratic Republic of Congo

Mustafa Yenal ■

■ Thousands of people have been killed and more than a million displaced in the Democratic Republic of Congo in recent years, raising fears of a return to the bloody civil wars of the 1990s and increasing pressure on President Joseph Kabila to step down or hold elections. Resource-rich central African country has been concentrated in the central Kasai region, where local communities formed a militia in support of a local leader who opposed the government and was killed by the police last summer.

There have been reports of dozens of massacres, ambushes and attacks on villagers. Local officials reported that 10 mass graves discovered and the total found is 50 since the outbreak of violence. All fear is for another civil war in Congo, the one happened between 1996-2003 killed 5 million people. Western and African powers concern that Congo may slide into anarchy. The atrocities in Kasai are only one component of a complicated and fractious nationwide picture. Scores of armed groups are thought to be active in the restive east.

The Bana Mura militia, which has been linked to the government, had carried out a string of ethnically motivated attacks in recent weeks, cutting off toddlers' limbs and stabbing pregnant

women, Zeid, the UN high commissioner for human rights, told the council and also called the region a "landscape of horror".

Joseph Kabila President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has repeatedly rejected calls to step down following the end of his second mandate in December, when a crackdown on protesters in Kinshasa and other major cities resulted in at least 40 deaths. In a statement on Sunday, Kabila denounced "interference" in Africa by "outside powers", which he said undermined the sovereignty of states.

Congo is a leading country in the world on producing cobalt with more than 80 million population and struggling with civil wars since the fall of military dictator Mobutu Sese Soko who was ousted in 1997 by a coalition of rebel groups.



MONUSCO vehicles in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2013.
Photo: MONUSCO Photos [Wikimedia Commons]



Kazakhstan hosts the World Expo 2017

Nicole Gefvenberg ■

■ Early June is seeing the former Soviet state of Kazakhstan take a step onto the global stage in launching the 2017 World Expo in the capital city of Astana. Kazakhstan has spent much of its modern existence in the shadow of its larger Slavic neighbour, first as a part of the Russian empire and later a Soviet satellite state, and with a multitude of ethnic minorities and vast untouched natural resources its footsteps on the world stage have been faint. Now hosting the three month expo, which is part of the World's Fair, may give Kazakhstan the opportunity to show its worth.

Given that Kazakhstan's global footprint is made almost entirely of fossil fuels after the discovery of massive oil and coal reserves in the 1990s, it may come as a surprise that the country will become Central Asia's proponent of future and renewable energy. However, the Expo's theme of future energy may be quite suitable as it taps into President Nursultan Nazarbayev's vision of Kazakhstan a strong driver of development in global questions and a powerful economy. Although there is a paradox when the country will be the voice of future energy when Astana is built on oil money and Kazakh industries and exports are defined by natural resources and raw materials, the Kazakh government has committed itself to developing renewable energy.

In recent years, the government has passed legislation on promoting renewable energy.

Especially leading up to the Expo, Kazakhstan has also been accused of corruption and bureaucracy, but this has in fairness not been ignored by the Kazakh state, which has tried to deal with the issue through legislation, and making the bureaucracy more efficient. Likewise, the capital of Astana and the preparation for the Expo has been haunted by construction issues like collapsing bridges, and the city has gained international criticism for practises like expelling its homeless population for the Expo.

More than 100 states and two dozen organisations are signed up to participate, which is much more than what was initially anticipated. In total, the Expo is expected to attract 5 million visitors, which is a substantial number, and although the Expo is being hailed as a success on the BIE's (Bureau International des Expositions) homepage, it pales in comparison to the Shanghai expo which attracted some 70 million visitors.

In the end, hosting the expo may be an auspicious opportunity for the region that often goes unheard and unnoticed. The road to developing renewable energy in Kazakhstan and making the country a global trading partner will be a long one, but hopefully the Expo will help the country's exposure to push it into greater development and attract much needed foreign investment.



Marawi conflict continues

Aysun Yıldız ■

■ In the conflict in Marawi, Mindanao province under the siege of the Maute organisation linked to the ISIS in the Philippines, the number of casualties has exceeded 300.

According to the Kyodo agency, the Speaker of the State of the Philippines, Ernesto Abella, said at a press conference that it would take about four weeks to kill 257 militants.



"We will fight everyday until this conflict is resolved," President Rodrigo Roa Duterte says to the men of the 2nd Mechanized Infantry Brigade in Iligan City on 26 May 2017 during his talk to men.
Photo: Philippine Information Agency [Wikimedia Commons]

Abella said that 62 soldiers lost their lives in the clashes between the Philippine security forces and the Maute organisation. Ernesto Abella

noted that efforts to rescue the remaining civilians in the region continued.

Army Spokesman Brigadier General Restitut Padilla at the same press conference stated that he took security measures at the entry and exit points of the troops as well as at the nearby ports to prevent the militants from escaping from the region. It was recorded that the person who was supposed to be the sister of Omer and Abdullah Maute and the next two were taken into custody in the city of Iloilo on the weekend. In Marawi conflict, as of June 15, 2017, 29 civilians were reportedly killed.

In the Philippines, the army launched an operation on May 23 at Marawi with US \$ 5 million in reward, and surrounded the Maute militants Marawi in connection with the terrorist organisation ISIS.

President Rodrigo Duterte declared a 60-day martial law in the province and returned to the country by cutting his visit to Russia. The army announced on May 31st 2017 that it provided attention to 90 percent of the Marawi.

The Maute organisation, Abdullah Maute and his brother, who organised the kidnappings and conducted assault activities in the country, was set up in 2012. In April 2015, Maute announced his commitment to ISIS.



Australian government declares gun amnesty

Megan Rogers ■

■ The Australian Government has formally announced the reintroduction of a national firearms amnesty for the first time in two decades.

The amnesty, a move not seen since the pivotal 1996 Port Arthur Massacre, will give those in possession of unregistered firearms three months to relinquish their weapons, starting from July 1 2017 and free from Australia's severe penalties commonly applied to such offences. Speaking on June 16, Justice Minister Michael Keenan announced, "As recent events have shown us, just one gun in the wrong hands can be deadly. Now is the time to run another amnesty, with the aim of reducing this pool of illegal guns".

Over the past half-decade Australia has experienced a steady influx in the use of illegal firearms in both national acts of terrorism and in instances of organised crime. For example, unregistered guns are thought to have been used in the 2014 Lindt Café hostage crisis, and in the murder of NSW police employee Curtis Cheng by teenager Farhad Jabar.

Australian officials anticipate that hosting an amnesty will aid authorities in ensuring that the current circulation of unregistered guns, believed to be some 260,000, do not fall into the

hands of those attempting to commit terroristic or other illegal activity.

Notwithstanding the recent tragedies felt by Australia, the nation continues to lead by example on the world stage by demonstrating how stricter laws on the possession of deadly weapons can reduce gun crime. Statistics boast impressive declines in gun-related homicide, suicide and mass shootings since the reforms of Australia's then Prime Minister John Winston Howard in 1996.



Firearms. Photo: Flickr



United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement

Lisa Maria Kuke ■

■ On 1 June 2017, the United States' government announced to leave the Paris agreement, a climate accord on environmental protection signed by 195 states across the globe on 12 December 2015. The Paris accord is based on the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and intends to decrease the effects of global warming by keeping the rise of the global temperature below two degrees Celsius. The agreement operates under the framework of enabling each signing country to decide about the contributions and targets they are willing and capable to achieve. The commitment is hereby neither binding nor enforceable.



Barack Obama, Xi Jinping and Ban ki-Moon exchange greetings at the conclusion of a climate event in 2016. Photo: Pete Souza [White House]

As the United States record the second highest carbon emissions worldwide in recent years, its participation was considered to be highly significant.

Under former US president Barack Obama, the US pledged to invest 3 billion US dollar to the global climate project. The current US president Donald Trump, however, announced to withdraw from the accord, stating it would represent “unfair” conditions to the US’ economic competitiveness and “America’s sovereignty”. The USA would be among the three countries worldwide that do not recognise the provisions of the Paris agreement, besides Syria and Nicaragua.

Trump additionally announced to initiate own efforts to engage in climate protection in case the multilateral accord from 2015 could not be renegotiated. However, the idea of renegotiation was already rejected by Germany and Italy. Further reactions to the US’ withdrawal involved the reaffirmation of the Paris agreement and its mission by several other involved countries, as France, China, and the United Kingdom. In addition, the international community expressed their disappointment with the US’ decision.

If the US’ intention to withdraw from the Paris Accord retains until 2019, it may proceed to initiate the one-year-procedure to leave the agreement’s framework.



Former FBI Director against President Trump

Tamar Buachidze ■

■ Former FBI Director James Comey's testimony against President Donald Trump is proved to be quite extraordinary: the ex-FBI chief typing notes of his first encounter with the then-President-elect. After Comey being sacked by the president he released seven pages of written testimony ahead of his in-person appearance before the Senate on June 8, providing detailed notes of nine one-on-one, increasingly awkward – and at times crass and bizarre – conversations with Trump. The fact of him taking detailed notes of all interactions with Trump after their first meeting on January 6, is something that stands out mentioning that he had not done that with President Barack Obama.

In that first meeting he told the then-President-elect he was not personally being investigated in the FBI's counter intelligence probe into Russian meddling in last year's presidential election. Next meeting on January 27, after President Trump's inauguration unfolded several hints on the process not going very smooth as Comey was asked whether he wanted to keep his position or not. The following meeting led to continuous "conversation about dropping any investigation of Flynn in connection with false statements about his conversations with the Russian ambassador in December 2016. Trump mentioned the fact of National Security Advisor Mike Flynn, who lost his job for misleading Vice-President Mike Pence about conversations with Russia's ambassador, being a good guy and

accordingly, asking for letting the investigation go. Comey found the request such a troubling attempt to interfere with his independence that he pleaded with Attorney-General Jeff Sessions to prevent any future one-on-one chats. Later on, in March, he was again contacted by president Trump who was underlining the fact of the ongoing Russian investigation being "a cloud" and him wanting Comey to "lift the cloud" as it was impairing his ability to do his best for the country. According to his notes, situation got even worse on April 11, when he received the confusing call president Trump asking him to publicly state he was not being investigated. The former FBI boss suggested the President to make the request through official channels at the Department of Justice. Trump replied he would do that and added: "Because I have been very loyal to you, very loyal." Within a month Trump had sacked the FBI boss.

Democrats afterwards have been already using the testimony to call for impeachment, but Republicans are laughing it off. James Comey's statements indeed were explosive about his interactions with president Trump in highly-anticipated and potentially consequential Senate testimony. His written records throughout months casts light on Trump's behaviour with the former FBI chief and the president's possible motives for firing him. Relying on Comey's comment, the lack of trust was one of the main reasons he kept the records.



President Trump announces MS-13 are to be deported “by the thousands”: El Salvador struggles with returning gang members and fears of increased violence

Megan Rogers ■

■ US President Donald Trump has continued to publicise anti-gang surges as a leading symbol of a broader clampdown on illegal immigration. His most recent speeches have centred on MS-13 – Mara Salvatrucha – a transnational gang formed in Los Angeles in the 1980s from amongst members of an immigrant community who had fled violent civil conflict in El Salvador.

At a previously postponed rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa on June 21 2017 President Trump demonstrated his deep commitment to the deportation of active gang members, “You have a gang called MS-13...These are true animals. We are moving them out of the country by the thousands.”

It remains to be confirmed, however, whether Trump is referring to current efforts by the US Immigration and Customs and Enforcement or its entire anti-gang initiative inaugurated in 2005.

Notwithstanding, Salvadoran officials have expressed anxiety over these initiatives, fearing that the return of gang members to a country which reluctantly boasts the highest homicide rates in the hemisphere will only spike further violence and inter-gang rivalry. Director of El Salvador’s immigration agency Héctor Antonio Rodríguez revealed, “This clearly affects El Salvador. We already have a climate of violence in the country that we are combatting. If gang members return, of course this worries us”.

In the wake of announcements from the Trump Administration, Salvadoran officials and authorities will host emergency meetings to discuss how the nation can best facilitate the return of gang members by deterring any accompanying violence feared to be inevitable.



Crisis in Venezuela

Aysun Yıldız ■

■ Protests in 2017 throughout Venezuela began in January after the arrest of multiple opposition leaders and the cancellation of dialogue between the opposition and Nicolás Maduro's government.

As the tensions continued, the 2017 Venezuelan constitutional crisis began in late March when the pro-Maduro Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ) dissolved the opposition-led National Assembly, with the intensity of protests increasing greatly throughout Venezuela following the decision. Into April, the protests grew “into the most combative since a wave of unrest in 2014” resulting from the crisis with hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans protesting daily through the month and into May 2017.

Venezuelans in cars and on motorcycles, bikes and horseback have clogged roads in the latest protests in more than a month of nationwide marches against President Nicolas Maduro.

Tens of thousands of protesters have turned out for near-daily protests in the country for weeks, seeking to remove Maduro and put an end to a devastating economic crisis that has caused widespread food and medicine shortages.

The unrest has killed at least 38 people since early April 2017, including protesters,

government sympathisers, bystanders and security forces. Hundreds have also been hurt or arrested.



Opposition protesters holding a Venezuelan flag during a protest in April.
Photo: Voice of America [Wikimedia Commons]

Meanwhile Venezuela's economy is in tatters with inflation rising by 800% in 2016 while the economy shrank by 18.6% over the same period, according to the central bank. Crime has soared with over 28,479 homicides in 2016 – one of the highest murder rates in the world. Finding food or medicine has become nearly impossible – except for the very few who can afford black market prices.

Economists argue that Venezuela is currently the worst economy in the world because nearly two decades of mismanagement and crippling price-controls destroyed the productive sector and bred corruption.



■ News in Brief

Domestic affairs affecting international relations

Brexit: Theresa May's proposal for permanently settled EU-citizens in the UK after Brexit

■ On 26 June 2017, British Prime Minister Theresa May presented a proposal to resolve the issues evolving around the settlement status of EU migrants within the United Kingdom after the Brexit. According to the paper, EU citizens, who resided in the UK for already five years by the day of the Brexit, are granted a permanent settlement status including all rights and benefits as British citizens. However, it is unclear how those migrants shall prove their previous 5-year-long stay, and to which extent this proposed regulation is applicable for those who interrupted their residence in the UK and those who have been residents for less than five years by the time of Brexit. Moreover, around 3 million migrants will have to repeat the application procedure for their permanent settlement. As many questions are still left unanswered, it is yet to be seen how the European Parliament will respond to May's proposal.

Terrorist attack on London Bridge

■ On 3 June 2017, a van was driven into pedestrians in London, then three male occupants ran to the nearby Borough Market Pub and restaurant area where they started to stab people with long knives. Eight people were

killed and 48 others injured during the incident. Attackers were wearing fake explosive vests and all shot dead by police. This attack was the third terrorist attack in Great Britain after the attack in Westminster in March and a bombing attack in Manchester in May.

A suspected terrorist was shot dead by soldiers in Brussels

■ On 20 June 2017, soldiers shot suspected terrorist dead at one of Brussels' main railway stations after a small explosion. "The suspect has been neutralised by the military that were present at the scene immediately after the explosion, he is dead," said the federal prosecutor's office spokesman Eric Van Der Sypt. No other casualties occurred in the incident and the suspect's identity is still a mystery. Nicolas Van Herrewegen, a railway sorting agent, said "I went down to the mezzanine level. Someone was shouting. Then he cried: 'Allahu Akbar' and he blew up a trolley."

Unidentified explosive device thrown into US Embassy in Kiev

■ On June 8 2017, an attacker threw an explosive device over the fence of the US Embassy in Kiev. The incident is called a "terrorist act" by authorities and no injuries



occurred according to the report. However, The US Department of State warned US citizens in Ukraine and mentioned that the situation in Ukraine is unpredictable and could change quickly.

Suicide car bomb attack in Mogadishu, Somalia

■ More than ten people died and twenty others wounded in a car bomb attack on a government building in the Somalia's capital Mogadishu on 20 June 2017. The attack was claimed by Islamist militant group Al-Shaabab who wants to force out African Union peacekeepers, topple the Western-backed government and impose its strict version of Islam. It was a suicide attack targeting and killing Somali government officials and their staff on the building. Less than a week before that, Al-Shaabab gunmen carried out another attack by killing at least 31 people in restaurant in Mogadishu.

Boko Haram attack in northern Nigerian city Maiduguri

■ On 7 June 2017, Boko Haram, Islamist terrorist group in Nigeria, launched a series of attacks simultaneously in the north-eastern Nigeria city Maiduguri. Several suicide bombers explode themselves in or around mosques, at least 11 people were killed and more than 24 wounded. The attacks were occurred while the soldiers were trying to repel another group of Boko Haram fighters who were trying to invade

the city. This attack was one of the biggest attack of Boko Haram in a year and a half in the north-eastern city Maiduguri.

Explosion near a kindergarten in Eastern China

■ At least seven people were killed and 65 others were wounded when the blast occurred at the entrance of a kindergarten in Eastern China on 15 June 2017. A gas cylinder at a roadside foot stall exploded near the entrance of Chuangxin Kindergarten in Fengxian. It is still not clear if the incident was deliberately set because kindergartens in China have been targeted before. In 2010, nearly twenty children were killed in attacks on schools. This led to tight controls over firearms by the government.

EU officials sign documents allowing Georgians visa-free EU entry

■ Documents formalising a visa-liberalisation deal with Georgia was signed on March 1, 2017 enabling Georgians to travel visa-free to the EU from March 28. The country having strong connection with Europe for centuries has eagerly waited for the moment overcoming diverse challenges and fulfilling necessary requirements. Georgia's European choice was and is often targeted by Northern neighbour, which has put persistent efforts to increase Moscow's influence following August war in



North Korea's 12th missile test

■ North Korea reportedly conducted another missile test on 8 June 2017. It was the 12th test with altogether 18 missiles since February 2017, including short and medium range (200 kilometre) ballistic missiles. It is assumed that the North Korean military attempts to successfully employ their first intercontinental ballistic missile that would potentially be able to reach the United States. The current tests were regarded as a provoking act, as South Korean military officials and the Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida stated shortly after the event.

South Korea conducts missile tests in response to the North Korean weapon development

■ South Korea successfully tested a ballistic missile southwest of Seoul on 23 June 2017. According to South Korean military officials, the missile covered a range of approximately 800 kilometres, thus being able to fully reach the North Korean peninsula. South Korean president Moon Jae-in declared the missile test to be a reaction to the ongoing ballistic missile tests conducted by North Korea. South Korea hereby seeks to enhance its military capacities to cope with the recent development of the North Korean nuclear weapons programme.

Donald Trump's next attempt to implement a travel ban

■ The Trump administration introduced a new travel ban applied on citizens from Libya, Syria, Iran, Somalia, Yemen, and Sudan for 90 days, that attempt to enter the United States with a valid visa. The bill additionally excludes refugees from entering the US for 120 days. The "travel ban 2.0" was introduced on 29 June after US president Trump's first attempt was ruled illegitimate by the US Supreme Court in March 2017. The state of Hawaii already filed an emergency motion to set the new travel regulation under investigation by a federal court.



Protest against Donald Trump's executive order banning citizens of seven countries from traveling to the United States. Photo: Wikimedia Commons



■ News in Brief

International relations

Cyprus unification talks to continue

■ Exiting a four hour meeting with Greek and Turkish leaders Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres were able to confirm that reunification talks in Cyprus are to recommence. Although the Turkish Republic in Cyprus is internationally unrecognised, the Mediterranean island has been divided since 1974 when the Turks invaded and occupied the north following the Greek coup attempt. The break of the deadlock in the talks were welcome news in Cyprus, and have been met with optimism and hopes that a settlement is within reach in the future. Although the talks had previously collapsed over the issue of the 35,000 Turkish troops in place and the UN has warned that this may be the last good chance of reaching a settlement, UN special envoy Espen Barth Eide said “there is an awareness that there is no time like the present.”



Ukraine celebrates visa-free travel to EU

■ On 11 June 2017, Ukrainians ended their long wait for visa-free travel to the European Union. President Petro Poroshenko opened a symbolic visa-free door to Europe at a gathering in capital Kiev and said “this is a historic moment when we are destroying the paper curtain that devided Ukraine from Europe.” Visa-free travel allows Ukrainians to enter the Schengen Area, including Switzerland and Iceland but not the UK or Ireland, with only a biometric passport without a visa for up to 90 days.

Two Iranian warships are heading to Oman

■ Iran is sending two warships to Oman just before the mission starts in international waters near the coast of Yemen. The ships, an Alborz destroyer and a Bushehr logistics warship, will depart from the port city of Bandar Abbas. This decision was made by Iran just after Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt severed ties with Qatar for allegedly supporting “extremism”. Iran also has dispatched four cargo planes of food to Qatar and plans to provide 100 tonnes fruit and vegetables every day.



Otto Warmbier deceased after comatose repatriation from North Korean working camp

■ Otto Warmbier, a US-American student imprisoned in a North Korean working camp since 2016, has been transported back to his hometown Virginia, United States in June 2017. Warmbier has been sentenced to 15 years of hard labour in North Korea in March 2016 after purloining a North Korean propaganda poster from a hotel. Shortly after the trial, Warmbier fell into a coma, allegedly caused by botulism and a sleeping pill. The comatose student who was being returned to the US to receive medical treatment, died on 19 June 2017 in consequence of a severe brain damage. As Warmbier's parents refuse an autopsy, further investigations about the cause of death are discontinued.

Panama severs diplomatic ties with Taiwan and establishes formal relations with China

■ Panama's President Juan Carlos Varela announced the break of any official relations with Taiwan and the establishment of formal relations with China on June 12th. This move is likely a part of Beijing's attempts to diplomatically isolate Taiwan to put pressure on the Taiwanese government for the election victory of Tsai Ing-wen, who does not endorse the view that Taiwan is part of a single Chinese nation. Formerly, Panama was one of the largest nations to have relations with Taiwan, who now is left with 20 diplomatic partners. China and Taiwan split in the 1949 Civil War, and the assimilation of Taiwan has long been on the Chinese agenda, which has led to a competition for diplomatic recognition.





Institute for Cultural Relations Policy



<http://culturalrelations.org>