

Quarterly Review of International Relations January-March 2016

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January 1st:

During a visit to a military base in Jordan French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian declares that France carries out air strikes against oil sites in Syria near Islamic State's stronghold of Raqqa.

January 2nd:

Saudi Arabia executes a prominent Shi'ite Muslim cleric and dozens of al Qaeda members, signaling that it would not tolerate attacks, whether by Sunni jihadists or minority Shi'ites, and stirring sectarian anger across the region.

January 3rd:

Saudi Arabia cuts ties with Iran, responding to the storming of its embassy in Tehran in an escalating row between the rival Middle East powers over Riyadh's execution of a Shi'ite Muslim cleric.

January 4th:

Hezbollah set off a bomb targeting Israeli forces at the Lebanese border in an apparent response to the killing in Syria on December 2015 of a prominent commander, triggering Israeli shelling of southern Lebanon.

January 5th:

Saudi Arabia signals that the breach in its relations with Iran would not affect talks on Syria, another round of which is scheduled in Geneva on January 2016.

January 6th:

North Korea announces it successfully tests a powerful nuclear bomb. The UN Security Council denounces it would begin working immediately on significant new measures in response to North Korea.

January 7-8th:

Two assailants armed with a gun, a knife and a suicide belt attack a hotel in the Egyptian Red Sea resort town of Hurghada, wounding two foreign tourists.

January 9th:

Riot police breaks up far-right protesters in Cologne as they march against Germany's open-door migration policy after asylum seekers were identified as suspects in assaults on women on New Year's Eve.

January 10th:

Thousands of people take to the streets of Hong Kong in a reprise of anti-China protests of 2015, demanding to know the whereabouts of five missing people linked to a local publisher of books critical of Beijing's leadership.

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January 11th:

Defence ministry official Lieutenant-General Sergei Rudskoy declares since the start of 2016 Russian air force jets have flown 311 combat sorties in Syria and attacked 1,097 terrorist targets in the country.

January 12th:

A suicide bomber thought to have crossed recently from Syria kills at least 10 people, most of them German tourists, in Istanbul's historic heart of Sultanahmet, in an attack Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu blamed on Islamic State.

January 13th:

Iran frees ten US sailors after detaining them on January 12th aboard two US Navy patrol boats in the Persian Gulf, bringing a swift end to an incident that had rattled nerves shortly before the expected implementation of a landmark nuclear accord.

January 14th:

Suicide bombers and gunmen attack the heart of Indonesia's capital Jakarta and the assault is claimed by Islamic State, the first time the radical group has targeted the world's most populous Muslim nation.

January 15th:

People die at a hotel in Burkina Faso's capital Ougadougou under attack by suspected Islamist militants who have taken hostages.

January 16th:

The United States lift nuclear-related sanctions on Iran after the International Atomic Energy Agency has certified Tehran has taken steps to limit its nuclear activities under a July 2014 agreement.

January 17th:

Islamic State militants kidnap 400 civilians when they attack government-held areas in the eastern Syrian city of Deir al-Zor, killing 300 people.

January 18th:

Talibans claim January 17th rocket's launch, landed near the Italian embassy in Kabul.

January 19th:

Libya's Presidential Council announces a new government aimed at uniting the warring factions, though two of its nine members reject it in a sign of continuing divisions over its UN-backed plan for a political transition.

January 20th-21st:

Islamic State militants set fire to oil storage tanks in a fresh assault on Ras Lanuf terminal in Northern Libya and the group threatens further attacks as they exploit a prolonged power *vacuum* in the large north African nation.

January 22nd:

At the 2016 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, US secretary of State John Kerry says he believes that, with effort and good faith on both sides, it would be possible to implement the Minsk agreements on Ukraine in coming months to allow for a lifting of sanctions on Russia.

January 23rd:

US vice president Joe Biden declares that the United States and Turkey are prepared for a military solution against Islamic State in Syria should the Syrian government and rebels fail to reach a political settlement.

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January 24th:

The lead negotiator Mohamad Alloush of the High Negotiation Committee (which is formed by groups of political and armed opponents to president Bashar al-Assad) says he was coming under pressure from US Secretary of State John Kerry to attend peace talks in Geneva (due to begin on January 25th) in order to negotiate over steps including a halt to air strikes.

January 25th:

Iranian president Hassan Rouhani flows to Italy at the start of his first official visit to Europe, expecting to sign multi-billion dollar contracts to help to modernize Iran's economy after years of crippling financial sanctions.

January 26th:

Libya is still in chaos after Libyan internationally recognized parliament voted on January 25th to reject a unity government proposed under a United Nations-backed plan to resolve the country's political crisis and armed conflict.

January 27th:

The European Commission warns Greece it could face more border controls with other States of the free-travel Schengen zone in May if it does not fix "serious deficiencies" in its management of the area's external frontier. The EU States have been increasingly critical of Athens' handling of the continent's worst migration crisis since World War Two.

January 28th:

Islamic State militants claim responsibility for a suicide car bombing outside Yemeni president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's residence in the southern city of Aden that kills at least six people.

January 29th:

Syria's main opposition group agrees to travel to Geneva, where the United Nations open peace talks to end the country's five-year-old war, but says it wanted to discuss humanitarian issues before engaging in political negotiations.

January 30th:

Turkey warns of consequences after declaring a Russian SU-34 jet violated its airspace despite warnings, once more stoking tensions between two countries involved in Syria's war, but Russia denies that there had been any incursion.

January 31st:

At least 60 people are killed, including 25 Shiite fighters, and dozens wounded by a car bomb and two suicide bombers in a district of Damascus where Syria's holiest Shiite shrine is located. Sunni fundamentalist Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks.

February 1st:

UN envoy Staffan de Mistura is due to meet Syrian opposition groups in Geneva, hoping to launch indirect peace talks after five years of war that killed 250.000 people. A meeting with the government delegation is postponed because de Mistura has first to meet the opposition.

February 2nd:

Officials from 23 countries meet in Rome to review the fight against ISIS. According to US Secretary of State John Kerry, this international coalition is pushing back Islamic State militants in their Syrian and Iraqi strongholds, but the group is threatening Libya and could seize the nation's oil wealth.

February 3rd:

UN envoy Staffan de Mistura announces a three-week pause in the Geneva talks, the first attempt to negotiate an end to Syria's war in two years. In the meantime, the



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government forces end a three and a half year siege of the Shiite towns of Nubul and al-Zahraa, a key step in a wider campaign to recapture all of Aleppo, Syria's biggest city before the war.

February 4th:

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), one of the world's biggest multinational trade deals, is signed by 12 member nations in Auckland, New Zealand, after five years of negotiations. The 12 countries include Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam. The TPP will now undergo a two-year ratification period in which at least six countries (that account for 85 percent of the combined gross domestic production of the 12 TPP nations) must approve the final text for the deal to be implemented.

February 5th:

Chinese President Xi Jinping tells US President Barack Obama in a telephone call that China is committed to the goal of the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and to maintaining peace and stability, according to State news agency Xinhua. North Korea has notified UN agencies that it will launch a rocket carrying what it called an earth observation satellite between February 8th and February 25th, a launch which some governments see as a long-range missile test.

February 6th:

The United States deploy missile defense systems that will work with the Japanese and South Korean militaries to track a rocket North Korea says it will launch over an 18-day period beginning on February 8th.

February 7th:

The United Nations Security Council strongly condemns North Korea's rocket launch and promises to take punitive steps, while Washington vows to ensure the 15-nation body imposes serious consequences on Pyongyang as soon as possible.

February 8th:

Italy demands that Egypt catch and punish those responsible for the death of a student found tortured by a roadside in Cairo, and the Egyptian government dismisses suggestions its security services could have been involved. Giulio Regeni, a 28-year-old graduate student at Britain's Cambridge University, had been researching independent trade unions in Egypt and had written articles critical of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government.

February 9th:

According to United Nations, hundreds of thousands of civilians could be cut off from food if Syrian government forces encircle rebel-held parts of Aleppo, the UN warning of a massive new exodus of refugees fleeing a Russian-backed assault. Syrian government forces, backed by Russian air strikes and Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters, launch a major offensive in the countryside around Aleppo, which has been divided between government and rebel control for years.

February 10th:

In Brussels NATO agrees its boldest steps yet to deter Russia from any attack in the Baltics or eastern Europe, setting out ways to rapidly deploy air, naval and ground forces without resorting to Cold War-era military bases. In an effort to dissuade Moscow after its 2014 annexation of Crimea, NATO defense ministers will rely on a network of new alliance outposts, forces on rotation, warehoused equipment and regular war games, all backed by a rapid-reaction force.

February 11th:

South Korea cuts off the supply of power and water into the Kaesong industrial zone run jointly with North Korea, after the North kicked out the South's workers and froze the



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assets of companies operating there. Seoul's decision is the punishment for the North's rocket launch on February 7th and last month's nuclear test. The North calls the move a declaration of war.

February 12th:

In Munich major powers begin a new round of Syria talks focusing on calls for a ceasefire and access for aid, but the mood is dour with Moscow showing no sign of calling off its bombing in support of a massive new government advance.

February 13th:

International divisions over Syria surface anew at a Munich conference where Russia rejects French charges that it is bombing civilians, just a day after world powers agreed on the cessation of hostilities due to begin in a week's time.

February 14th:

According to sources of the White House, the president of United States Barack Obama discusses the Syria crisis with Russian leader Vladimir Putin by telephone, including the importance of rushing humanitarian aid to that country and of containing air strikes.

February 15th:

China's foreign ministry urges the United States and North Korea to sit down with each other face-to-face and resolve the nuclear crisis in the Korean peninsula, as tension continues to climb after North Korea's latest rocket test.

February 16th:

Turkey is asking allies including the United States to take part in a joint ground operation in Syria, as a Moscow-backed government advance nears its borders, raising the possibility of direct confrontation between the NATO member and Russia. A large-scale joint ground operation is still unlikely: Washington has ruled out a major offensive. But the request shows how swiftly a Russian-backed advance in recent weeks has transformed a conflict that has drawn in most regional and global powers.

February 17th:

According to Taiwan and US officials, China deploys an advanced surface-to-air missile system to one of the disputed islands it controls in the South China Sea, increasing tensions even as US President Barack Obama urges restraint in the region. The missile batteries have been set up on Woody Island, a part of the Paracels chain, under Chinese control for more than 40 years but also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam.

February 18th:

At the summit of European Union leaders in Brussels the extent to which British regulators can write their own banking rules remains a stumbling block. The meeting will try to thrash out a deal to keep Britain in the bloc.

February 19th:

Austria, which angered other European Union States by announcing a daily cap on immigration and asylum claims, announces it would have to introduce even stricter limits in future.

February 20th:

British Prime Minister David Cameron calls a June 23rd *referendum* on membership of the European Union that could have far-reaching consequences for Britain's unity and for the viability of the world's biggest trading bloc.

February 21st:

Twin car bomb blasts kill at least 57 people in Syria's Homs in an attack claimed by Islamic State. At least 100 others are injured in the attack in the central Zahra district of the western city.

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February 22nd:

The United States and Russia announce plans for a cessation of hostilities in Syria that would take effect on February 27th but exclude militants from the Islamic State, Nusra Front and others the United Nations deem as terrorist groups.

February 23rd:

The government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and rebel groups accept the plan for cessation of hostilities to begin on February 27th and the United States warn it would be hard to hold the country together if the fighting will not stop. The fight will continue against the Islamic State and Nusra Front, considered as terroristic forces.

February 24th:

European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker announce to the European Parliament that European Union leaders will hold a special summit with Turkey on the migration crisis on March 7th.

February 25th:

According to Libyan military commanders, French military advisers are coordinating Libyan forces fighting Islamic State insurgents in the eastern city of Benghazi, where pro-government brigades have been making progress.

February 26th:

A cessation of hostilities in Syria comes into effect at the agreed time of midnight on February 27th (22.00 GMT February 26th), under a US-Russian plan which warring sides in the five-year conflict say they would commit to.

February 27th:

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani earns an emphatic vote of confidence and reformist partners secure surprise gains in Parliament in early results from the political elections that could accelerate the Islamic Republic's emergence from years of isolation.

February 28th:

The Council of Europe's Venice Commission declares reforms of Poland's constitutional court pose a danger to the rule of law in the European Union member State. The Commission was asked to comment on the legal changes after Polish parliament overruled appointments made to the Court by the last government, causing uncertainty over its proceedings.

February 29th:

Macedonian police fires teargas to disperse hundreds of migrants, who stormed the border from Greece while Europe is deeply divided dealing with the biggest humanitarian crisis in decades.

March 1st:

According to the United Nations, the build-up of thousands of migrants and refugees on Greece's northern borders is fast turning into a humanitarian disaster, as EU prepares to offer more financial aid.

March 2nd:

North Korea faces harsh new UN sanctions to starve it of money for its nuclear weapons program following a unanimous Security Council vote on a resolution drafted by the United States and Pyongyang's ally China.

March 3rd:

Two Italian civilians held hostages in Libya are killed in fighting in the western Libyan city of Sabratha. The men are two of the four employees of the Italian construction company Bonatti who were kidnapped on July 2015 near a compound owned by oil and gas group Eni.

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March 4th:

According to North Korean official KCNA news agency, leader Kim Jong Un orders his country to be ready to use its nuclear weapons at any time and the military to be in pre-emptive attack mode in the face of growing threats from its 'enemies'.

March 5th- 6th:

According to Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, Greece will press for solidarity with refugees and fair burden-sharing among European Union States at March 7th emergency EU summit with Turkey, lashing out at border restrictions that led to logjams. Tsipras accuses Austria and Balkan countries of «ruining Europe» by slowing the flow of migrants and refugees heading North from Greece, where some 30.000 are trapped, waiting for Macedonia to reopen its border so they can head to Germany.

March 7th:

During the emergency EU-Turkey summit, Turkey offers the European Union greater help to stem a flood of migrants into Europe but raises the stakes by demanding more money, accelerating membership talks and faster visa-free travel for its citizens in return.

March 8th:

Turkey and Greece vow a close cooperation on a plan to send back migrants rejected from EU joining an agreement they hope will end illegal flows of people across the Aegean Sea. In fact, EU leaders welcome an offer by Ankara to take back migrants crossing into Europe and agree in principle to its other demands but delay a deal until March 17th-18th.

March 9th:

After Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia have taken steps to limit the number of migrants allowed to cross their borders, Hungarian Interior Minister Sandor Pinter says the country will send more police and army troops to patrol its southern borders, declaring the state of emergency.

March 10th:

According to the director of US National Intelligence James Clapper, China will be able to project substantial offensive military power from artificial islands it has built in the South China Sea's disputed Spratly Islands within months.

March 11th:

According to senior Turkish officials, Turkey is working on measures to fulfill its part in a potential 6 billion euro deal to take back illegal migrants from Europe and will involve the UN to ensure it complies with international law.

March 12th:

Libya's UN-backed Presidential Council calls on the country's institutions to begin a transfer of authority to a unity government, and appeals to the international community to stop dealing with any rival powers. The Presidential Council is tasked with guiding through a transition to end the political chaos and armed conflict that has plagued Libya since the fall of leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

March 13th:

A car bomb explodes in the Turkish capital Ankara, killing at least 34 people and wounding 125 in the second such attack in the administrative heart of the city in less than a month since February 2016. The first findings suggest that the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) or an affiliated group are responsible. Gunmen from al Qaeda's North African branch kill 16 people, including four Europeans, at a beach resort town in Ivory Coast.

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March 14th:

Russian President Vladimir Putin says he is instructing his armed forces to start pulling out of Syria, more than five months after he ordered the launch of a military operation that shored up his ally, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

March 15th:

Belgian police organize an operation in Malbec area (Brussels) after four officers, including a French policewoman, have been lightly wounded in a raid on an apartment, during which a suspect armed with an assault rifle was killed by police. The man is linked to November 2015's Islamist attacks in Paris.

March 16th:

The European Union agrees on sanctions to three Libyan leaders who oppose a Western-backed unity government, clearing the way for travel bans and asset freezes to be imposed.

March 17th:

In Brussels European Union leaders meet seeking agreement with Turkey to stop migrants reaching Greece and voice a mix of hope for a fix to the crisis and caution that a deal can fall through or prove unworkable.

March 18-19th:

Salah Abdeslam, the prime suspect in November's Paris attacks, along with a second man detained with him are arrested in Brussels and are formally charged with involvement in terrorist murder.

March 20th:

President Barack Obama arrives in Cuba for a 48-hour visit, making history by venturing into what was once enemy territory and sparking enthusiasm among Cubans who have seen their Communist government vilify 10 previous US leaders. The visit is the first one by a US President in 88 years.

March 21st:

US President Barack Obama is received by Cuban President Raul Castro in Havana at the start of historic talks where the US leader presses his counterpart for economic and democratic reforms while hearing complaints about US sanctions.

March 22nd:

In Brussels 31 people are killed and 260 wounded in twin attacks on the airport and on a rush-hour metro train, triggering security alerts across Europe and bringing some cross-border transport to a halt.

March 23rd:

Belgian police identify a prime suspect in March 22nd Brussels blasts and two suspected suicide bombers, linking them directly to Islamic State militants last November 2015's Paris attacks.

March 24th:

Secretary of State John Kerry, ahead of a meeting with Vladimir Putin, says the United States and Russia must work together to end the war in Syria despite their differences, and calls for a further reduction in violence and more aid deliveries.

March 25th:

Belgian police arrest seven people and Germany arrests two in investigations into Islamic State suicide bombings in Brussels, while authorities in France say they thwarted a militant plot there that was at an advanced stage.



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March 26th:

Syrian government forces advance into Palmyra with heavy support from Russian air strikes, taking control of several districts in a major assault against Islamic State fighters.

March 27th:

The Taliban faction Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (which declares loyalty to the Islamic State) claims responsibility for a suicide bomb attack that killed at least 65 people in the Pakistani city of Lahore, saying the target of its attack was Muslim Pakistan's small Christian minority.

March 28th:

Pakistan will launch a paramilitary crackdown on Islamist militants in Punjab, the country's richest and most populous province, after the Easter Day bombing killed 70 people in Lahore.

March 29th:

An EgyptAir plane flying from Alexandria to Cairo is hijacked and forced to land in Cyprus by a man with what authorities say is a fake suicide belt, who is arrested after giving himself up.

March 30th:

Seven members of the Libya's U.N.-backed Presidential Council, including Fayeaz Seraj, its head and the new government's prime minister, arrive from Tunisia at Tripoli's Abusita naval base amid tight security, to defy attempts to keep them out of the city and to prevent them from installing a unity government.

March 31st:

Libya's unity government tries to assert its authority in Tripoli after the new prime minister-designate's sudden arrival in the capital sparked tensions. The Lybian Congress of the Tripoli's government declares to be against Fayeaz al Sarraj and its new executive.



