

Quarterly Review of International Relations April-June 2016

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April 1st:

North Korea declares it will pursue its nuclear and ballistic missile program in defiance of the United States and its allies, adding that a state of 'semi-war' now existed on the divided Korean peninsula.

April 2nd:

A new wave of fighting breaks out in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, killing dozens and drawing international calls for an immediate ceasefire to stop violence spreading in the South Caucasus. Nagorno-Karabakh, which lies inside Azerbaijan but is controlled by ethnic Armenians, has run its own affairs with heavy military and financial backing from Armenia since a separatist war ended in 1994.

April 3rd:

Dutch voters will decide on April 5th whether to support a European treaty deepening ties with Ukraine in a *referendum* that will test sentiment towards Brussels ahead of Britain's June Brexit vote and could also bring a boost for Russia.

April 4th:

Governments across the world begin investigating possible financial wrongdoing by the rich and powerful after a leak of four decades of documents from a Panamanian law firm that specialized in setting up offshore companies (the so-called Panama Papers).

April 5th:

Syrian rebel forces close in on the town of al-Rai near the Turkish border held by Islamic State militants after seizing numerous villages from the group in the area. The rebels involved in the offensive include factions fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army that have been supplied with weapons *via* Turkey.

April 6th:

The Syrian army and its allies launch a major attack on insurgents south of Aleppo, described as the fiercest government assault in the area since an agreement to ease the fighting came into effect in February 2016. Fighting south of Aleppo in recent days has put further strain on the already widely violated ceasefire deal brokered by the United States and Russia with the aim of launching a diplomatic process towards ending the five-year-long war.

April 7th:

According to the results of a *referendum* held in the Netherlands, the Dutch reject an agreement on closer EU ties with Ukraine, highlighting the difficulties of further European integration.

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April 8th:

Mohamed Abrini, wanted for November 2015's Islamic State attacks in Paris, among five people is arrested in Brussels: he's resulting to be also involved to March 2015's Brussels bombings.

April 9th:

Russia declares it will continue selling arms to both Azerbaijan and Armenia despite the latest flare-up of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, angering the Armenians who consider Moscow a close ally. A Moscow-brokered ceasefire agreed on April 5th has stopped the outburst of violence in which Azerbaijan and the Armenia-backed rebel region has lost dozens of their servicemen.

April 10th:

The European Commission will propose in April 2016 granting visa-free travel to Ukrainians despite the Dutch referendum vote against an EU-Ukraine agreement partly motivated by hostility to migration. In the meantime, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk tenders his resignation, paving the way for Western-backed coalition parties to nominate an ally of President Petro Poroshenko to try to form a more stable government in the country.

April 11th:

Greece and its international lenders (the European Commission, the European Central Bank - ECB, European Stability Mechanism and the International Monetary Fund) are edging closer to a compromise on signing off on a review of bailout reforms which could unlock more aid to the country, after 10 hours of overnight negotiations' marathon talks.

April 12th:

Greece declares authorities would start ruling on asylum applications (which are under the EU-Turkey deal) from hundreds of migrants since the end of April 2016, in a major test of a new deal to try to control the flow of people desperate to reach Europe.

April 13th:

Syrians vote in a parliamentary election in government-held areas of the country in what they called a show of support for President Bashar al-Assad, while his opponents and Western powers denounce the poll as illegitimate.

April 14th:

After the announcement of introducing tougher border controls at the Brenner crossing with Italy from June 1st at the latest (as part of the country's increasingly tough response to the EU migration crisis), Austrian Defense Minister Hans Peter Doskozil declares his country is preparing barriers also on the Hungarian border.

April 15th:

The Syrian government delegation led by UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari arrives in Geneva for their first session of the latest round of peace talks, where they face pressure to negotiate terms for a political transition.

April 16th:

Pope Francis takes three families of Syrian refugees back to Rome after visiting the frontline of Europe's migrant crisis at a camp in the Greek island of Lesbo.

April 17th-18th:

The President of Brazil Dilma Rousseff is charged of impeachment after the lower house of the Brazilian Congress's decision, supported by the two-thirds majority of the votes needed to send the leftist president for trial. Rousseff is accused of manipulating budgetary accounts.

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April 19th:

Syrian peace talks in Geneva appear all but doomed after air strikes killed about 40 people in a crowded vegetable market in rebel territory, with the opposition saying a truce is finished and it would keep out of negotiations indefinitely.

April 20th:

US President Barack Obama meets in Riyadh Saudi Arabia's King Salman to seek joint action on security threats including Iran and Isis, but his visit is overshadowed by Gulf Arab exasperation with his approach to the region.

April 21st:

During the summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Riyadh, US President Barack Obama declares the USA will deter and confront aggression against Gulf Arab monarchies, who continue to have concerns about threats from Iran.

April 22nd:

US President Barack Obama warns Great Britain that it would find itself «at the back of the queue» for a trade deal with the United States if it votes to leave EU in the *referendum* of June 2016.

April 23rd:

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and US President Barack Obama declare they look with favor a US-EU free trade agreement (Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership – TTIP) as it will fuel growth on both sides of the Atlantic.

April 24th:

North Korea Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong declares to the Associated Press in New York that his country is ready to halt nuclear tests if the United States suspends military exercises with South Korea, after North Korean latest submarine-launched ballistic missile test, conducted under the supervision of Kim Jong-un.

April 25th:

In Hanover US President Barack Obama declares the United States need a strong, united Europe to maintain international order, and he urges European allies to increase defense spending to address Islamic State and other security threats.

April 26th:

Uzbek President Islam Karimov claims it is important to resume peace talks between Afghanistan's central government and the Taliban movement, adding it is crucial that Russia takes part in the talks.

April 27th:

Rolling out an 'America first' foreign policy, Republican front-runner to the Presidential elections in the USA Donald Trump vows that if he were elected president, US allies in Europe and Asia would have to fend for themselves if they do not pay more for the American defense umbrella.

April 28th:

Air strikes destroy a hospital and kill dozen of people in Is-held areas of Syria's Aleppo (which is split between government forces and rebels) including children and doctors; the UN call on Moscow and Washington to salvage a 'barely-alive' cease fire.

April 29th:

Syria calls local truces near Damascus and in a northern province but no halt to combat on the main battlefield in Aleppo, after a surge in fighting the United Nations say showed 'monstrous disregard' for civilian lives. A new 'regime of calm' would begin from 1:00 a.m.

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on April 30th but by excluding the city of Aleppo, scene of the worst recent violence, the narrow truces are unlikely to resurrect a ceasefire and peace talks that recently have collapsed.

April 30th - May 1st:

In Baghdad hundreds of the cleric's followers storm into the Green Zone and enter parliament after it has denounced politicians' failure to reform a political *quota* system blamed for rampant corruption.

Iraqi security forces fire tear gas and bullets into the air in an effort to stop more supporters of Shi'ite Muslim cleric Moqtada al-Sadr from entering Baghdad's fortified Green Zone.

May 2nd:

A UN court rules that India must allow the Italian marine Salvatore Girone (detained in Delhi in the Italian Embassy for more than four years) to go home. India acknowledges the ruling but declares Salvatore Girone will remain under the authority of its Supreme Court which could impose various conditions on his release.

May 3rd:

The European Union's executive will propose a reform of the bloc's asylum rules that reflects caution in the face of deep divisions among governments about how to handle the migration crisis. On April 2016 the European Commission has floated scrapping a rule in the so-called Dublin system that gives responsibility for handling asylum claims to the first EU state a person enters, a rule that has placed heavy burdens on Greece and Italy. However it would now issue a legislative proposal retaining the 'first country' principle while including a central scheme to spread claimants around Europe to give the frontline states the chance to relocate asylum seekers to other EU countries if arrivals on their borders are too high.

May 4th:

France and United Kingdom call for a urgent meeting of the UN Security Council after dozens of people are killed in a day-long battle between Syrian rebels and government forces in western Aleppo, with rebels saying they are forced to retreat by heavy aerial bombing.

May 5th:

A cessation of hostilities brokered by Russia and the United States brings a measure of relief to Aleppo but fighting rages nearby and President Bashar al-Assad declares he still sees a total victory over rebels in Syria.

May 6th:

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan tells the European Union that Turkey will not make changes to its terrorism laws required under a deal to curb migration, and declares: «We are going our way, you go yours».

May 7th-8th:

Secretive North Korea declares it will strengthen self-defensive nuclear weapons capability, according to its KCNA news agency, with a decision adopted in defiance of UN resolutions at a rare Congress (the first in 36 years) of its ruling Workers' Party. The Congress's decision on strengthening the capability of its nuclear weapons formalizes North Korea's official position on its nuclear proliferation.

May 9th- 10th:

The acting speaker of the lower house of Brazil's Congress annuls the impeachment process against President Dilma Rousseff and declares that the impeachment process should be returned by the Senate so that the lower house can vote again on May 11th:

May 11th:

The Brazilian Senate is expected to suspend President Dilma Rousseff in a vote to put her on trial for breaking budget laws, pushing a deeply unpopular leader from power and ending 13 years of rule by her leftist Workers Party.

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May 12th:

Suspended Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff vows she will fight to prove her innocence after the Senate voted to put her on trial for breaking budget laws, vote which is defined by Rousseff as a *golpe*.

May 13th:

President Barack Obama and the leaders of five Nordic nations present at the White House a united front against Russia, expressing concern about Moscow's military buildup in the Baltic and calling for sanctions against Russia to continue. The Heads of State of Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland gather in Washington for talks that focus on Russia and the crisis in Syria and Iraq.

May 14th:

Police clashes with Islamist militants in Russia's volatile Dagestan region, with four rebels and two officers killed. Islamic State claims its fighters are behind the attack.

May 15th:

An Islamic State attack on a State-run gas plant in Baghdad's northern outskirts kills at least 11 people, including policemen, and forces two power stations it supplies to suspend electricity production.

May 16th:

Libya's UN-backed unity government meets Western and regional powers in Vienna to seek their help as it tries to establish authority over a country divided by armed factions and threatened by Islamist insurgents.

May 17th:

Major power foreign ministers fail to agree a new date to resume Syrian peace talks at a meeting in Vienna, and the opposition declares it will not come back to Geneva negotiations unless conditions improve on the ground. A pessimistic atmosphere pervades the meeting between countries that support President Bashar al-Assad and his enemies, all of which commit to reviving a ceasefire and peace process that have been unraveling since April 2016.

May 18th:

The International Monetary Fund agrees with Ukraine the reform policies it must implement for the board to approve in July 2016 to dispense a long-delayed third *tranche* of loans under a \$17,5 billion bailout program.

May 19th:

An EgyptAir jet carrying 66 passengers and crew from Paris to Cairo disappears from radar over the Mediterranean South of Greece, with Athens saying the plane has swerved in mid-air before plunging from cruising height and vanishing. The country's aviation minister suspects a terrorist attack to be more likely to have taken down the aircraft than a technical failure.

May 20th:

According to the US State Department, there is no agreement between the United States and Russia to conduct joint air strikes in Syria: the US adds it looks to Russia to stop truce violations by the Syrian government.

May 21st:

Finance ministers and central bankers hold their first session at the G7 meeting in Sendai, Japan, reaffirming the importance of exchange-rate stability.

May 22nd:

According to the President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt sends a robot submarine to join the hunt for an EgyptAir plane which has crashed on May 19th in some of the deepest waters of the Mediterranean Sea with 66 people on board.

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May 23rd:

Bomb blasts kill scores of people in Jableh and Tartous on Syria's Mediterranean coast and wound many others in the government-controlled territory that hosts Russian military bases.

May 24th:

Greece sends police and bulldozers to knock down tents and relocate hundreds of migrants who have been stranded for months in the makeshift camp of Idomeni, on the border with Macedonia, in difficult, overcrowded conditions with poor sanitation.

May 25th:

The Afghan Taliban name an Islamic legal scholar who is one of former leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour's deputies to succeed him, after confirming Mansour's death in a US drone strike on May 21st.

May 26th:

Group of Seven (G7) leaders agree on the need to send a strong message on maritime claims in the Western Pacific, where an increasingly assertive China is locked in territorial disputes with Japan and several South-East Asian nations. The agreement prompts a sharp rejoinder from China, which is not in the G7 club but whose rise as a power has put it at the heart of some discussions at the advanced nations' summit which takes place in Ise-Shima (Japan).

May 27th-May 28th:

In the G7 summit in Japan British Prime Minister David Cameron talks with other G7 leaders mainly on June 2016's vote on whether Britain should ditch its membership of the European Union, exposing the risk of Brexit.

May 29th:

According to UN Refugee Agency, between May 23rd and May 29th at least 700 migrants may have died in the sea crossing from Libya towards Italy.

May 30th:

The Iraqi army storms to the southern edge of Falluja under US air support and captures a police station inside the city limits, launching a direct assault to retake one of the main strongholds of Islamic State militants.

May 31st:

The United States warns its citizens of possible summer terrorist attacks in Europe, declaring targets can include the European soccer championship in France, although a US officials underline there are no specific threat information.

June 1st:

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declares that Iraq delays its assault on the city of Falluja because of fears for the safety of civilians, as his forces halt at the city's edge in the face of ferocious resistance from Islamic State fighters.

June 2nd:

Turkey recalls its ambassador to Germany in protest against a German Parliament resolution declaring the 1915 massacre of Armenians by Ottoman forces a genocide at a time when Europe is looking for Ankara's help in the migrant crisis.

June 3rd-4th:

The Syrian army backed by Russian air strikes opens a major new front against Islamic State, the third big assault on the self-proclaimed caliphate after Iraqi forces have attempted to storm the city of Falluja and a Syrian militia advanced with US support.

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June 5th:

Nearly 50 strikes hit rebel-held areas in and around the Syrian city of Aleppo in some of the heaviest recent raids by Russian and Syrian government aircraft. Full control of Aleppo would be a huge prize for President Bashar al-Assad. Russia's military intervention since September 2015 has helped to bolster Assad's government

June 6th:

Ukraine's State security service declares a French citizen detained in late May 2016 on the border with Poland has planned attacks in France to coincide with the Euro 2016 football championship it is hosting.

June 7th:

With the Democratic presidential nomination effectively wrapped up, Hillary Clinton's campaign bring a definitive end to her protracted primary battle against Bernie Sanders. A former US Secretary of State, Clinton is the first woman presidential candidate of a major US political party.

June 8th:

Islamic State's far-flung enemies in Syria and Iraq press ahead with major advances on multiple fronts that put some of the greatest pressure on the ultra-hardline Islamists since they have declared their caliphate in 2014. US military sources in Northern Syria confirm it is poised to enter the city of Manbij, after launching an assault with the aim of cutting off the last stretch of Turkish frontier (which is still under Islamic State control).

June 9th:

In Israel in a trendy shopping and dining market near Israel's Defense Ministry two gunmen fire on the crowd killing four persons and wounding other six. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the assault.

June 10th:

Brazil's Dilma Rousseff declares she will call a *referendum* on holding early elections if she is reinstated as President, an offer analysts see as a bid to sway undecided senators to help clear her in an impeachment trial.

June 11th:

Islamic State claims responsibility for suicide and car bomb blasts that hits a Damascus suburb near Syria's holiest Shi'ite Muslim shrine. The ISIS leaders leave Sirte during the offensive of Libyan forces to free the coastal city.

June 12th:

A gunman kills 50 people at a packed gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida in the worst mass shooting in U.S. history which authorities described as a possible act of terrorism. Police kills the shooter, who is identified as Omar S. Mateen, a Florida resident.

June 13th:

Britain's blue-chip shares index falls for the third day in a row but outperforms other European bourses, as widespread unease about the country's looming European Union membership vote weighed on markets.

June 14th:

In Paris a Frenchman who pledges allegiance to Islamic State stabs a police commander to death outside his home and kills his partner, who also has worked for the police, in an attack the French government denounced as 'an abject act of terrorism'.

June 15th:

Belgian police receives an anti-terror alert warning that a group of Islamic State fighters have recently left Syria *en route* for Europe planning attacks in Belgium and France.

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French President François Hollande declares that the authorizations for demonstrations and processions in the country will be examined «case by case».

June 16th:

In Brussels anxious European leaders issue a chorus of calls to Britons to stay in the European Union rather than risk years of economic damage.

June 17th:

Iraqi forces enter the centre of Falluja, the Iraqi city longest held by Islamic State, nearly four weeks after the start of a US-backed offensive that has cleared out the tens of thousands of residents still there.

June 18th:

Belgian police arrest 12 suspects in a major anti-terror operation overnight amid security alerts in Belgium and France around the Euro 2016 football tournament and just three months after Islamist bombers wrought carnage in Brussels.

June 19th- 20th:

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier declares the European Union should gradually phase out sanctions imposed against Russia over the Ukraine crisis if there is substantial progress in the peace process.

June 21st:

The European Union's Brussels envoys agree to extend until the end of January 2017 the energy, financial and defense sanctions on Russia over the conflict in Ukraine.

June 22nd:

North Korea launches what appears to be an intermediate-range missile to a high altitude in the direction of Japan before it plunges into the sea: a technological advance for the isolated State after several test failures.

June 23rd:

In Viernheim, Germany, a masked man takes hostages at a cinema before police storms the complex and shoots him dead.

June 24th:

According to the results of the *referendum* on Brexit, the United Kingdom votes to go out of the European Union. EU leaders are determined to keep the unity of the EU after the vote. Earthquakes for the financial markets all over the world after the outcome of the *referendum*.

June 25th:

German Chancellor Angela Merkel calls for clear-headed negotiations with Britain on its departure from the European Union, stressing that talks with the «close partner» must take place in a good atmosphere.

June 26th- 27th:

Britain's decision to leave the European Union sends new shockwaves through financial markets, with the pound falling despite the country's leaders' attempts to ease political and economic turmoil unleashed by the move.

June 28th:

European leaders tell Britain to act quickly to resolve the political and economic chaos unleashed by its vote to leave the European Union, a move the IMF declares can put pressure on global growth. Financial markets recover slightly after the result of British *referendum* wiped a record \$3 trillion (£2.25 trillion) off global shares and sterling falls to its lowest level in 31 years against the dollar.

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June 29th- 30th:

Turkish investigators pore over video footage and witness statements after three suspected Islamic State suicide bombers have opened fire and have blown themselves up in Istanbul's main airport on June 28th, killing 41 people and wounding 239. The suspected Islamic State suicide bombers are supposed to be Russian, Uzbek and Kyrgyz nationals.