

Quarterly Review of International Relations

January-March 2020

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January 1st:

North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un plans to further develop nuclear programs and to introduce a «new strategic weapon» in the near future, although he signals there is still room for dialogue with the United States.

January 2nd:

Hong Kong police arrests about 400 people in New Year's Day protests after what has started as a peaceful pro-democracy march of tens of thousands spiraled into chaotic scenes with police firing tear gas to disperse the crowds.

January 3rd:

Iran promises vengeance after a US air strike in Baghdad has killed Qassem Soleimani, Tehran's most prominent military commander and the architect of its growing influence in the Middle East.

January 4th:

With shouts of «Death to America», tens of thousands of people march in Iraq to mourn Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani and an Iraqi militia leader who have been killed in a US air strike that has raised the specter of wider conflict in the Middle East.

January 5th:

Iraq's Parliament calls for US and other foreign troops to leave amid a growing backlash against the US killing of Qassem Soleimani.

January 6th:

Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei weeps in grief with hundreds of thousands of mourners thronging Tehran's streets for the funeral of Qassem Soleimani, killed by a US drone on the orders of US President Donald Trump.

January 7th:

At least 56 people are killed in a stampede as tens of thousands of mourners pack streets for the funeral of Qassem Soleimani, forcing his burial to be delayed by several hours.

January 8th:

Donald Trump backs away from days of angry rhetoric against Iran as the two countries try to defuse the crisis over the American killing of Qassem Soleimani.

January 9th:

Iran spurns Donald Trump's call for a new nuclear pact and its commanders threaten more attacks as the Middle East remained on edge following the US killing of Qassem Soleimani and Tehran's retaliatory missile strikes.

January 10th:

Washington dismisses the Iraqi request to prepare to pull out its troops, amid heightened US-Iranian tensions after the US killing of Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad, and declares it is exploring a possible expansion of NATO's presence in the area.

January 11th:

Iran declares its military has shot down a Ukrainian plane on January 8th killing all 176 aboard in a «disastrous mistake», saying air defenses fired in error while on alert after Iranian missile strikes on US targets in Iraq.

January 12th:

Protests erupt across Iran for a second day, piling pressure on the leadership after the military has admitted it has mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian airliner at a time when Tehran has feared US air strikes.

January 13th:

Libya's warring leaders make some progress at indirect peace talks in Moscow but fail to agree on an unconditional and open-ended ceasefire.

January 14th:

Great Britain, France and Germany formally accuse Iran of violating the terms of its 2015 agreement to curb its nuclear program, a step by the three powers that can lead eventually to the reimposing of UN sanctions lifted under the deal.

January 15th:

Russian President Vladimir Putin proposes constitutional changes that will give him scope to extend his grip on power after leaving the presidency, and picks a new prime minister after Dmitry Medvedev and his cabinet have stepped down: Mikhail Mishustin, 53-year-old head of the tax service.

January 16th:

The Russian Parliament overwhelmingly backs Vladimir Putin's surprise choice for Prime Minister after what one daily has called «The January revolution», a major political overhaul that some say could set Putin up as leader for life.

January 17th:

Ali Khamenei throws his support behind the *élite* Revolutionary Guards in a rare public sermon after their belated admission that they have accidentally downed an Ukrainian airliner has triggered days of protests on the streets of the main cities of Iran.

January 18th:

In Afgoye, Northwest of the capital Mogadishu, Somali insurgents linked to al Qaeda claim responsibility for a car bombing that wounds at least 15 people.

January 19th:

Forces loyal to Eastern commander Khalifa Haftar shut off production at all Libya's major oil fields, an escalation that threatens to strangle the country's finances and overshadows the international peace summit in Berlin.

January 20th:

Iran declares it can quit the global nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if European countries refer it to the UN Security Council over a nuclear agreement, a move that would overturn diplomacy in its confrontation with the West.

January 21st:

North Korea declares it is no longer bound by commitments to halt nuclear and missile testing, blaming the United States' failure to meet a year-end deadline for nuclear talks and «brutal and inhumane» US sanctions.

January 22nd:

Deaths from China's new flu-like virus rise to 17 with more than 540 cases confirmed, increasing fears of contagion from an infection suspected to originate from illegally traded wildlife.

January 23rd:

The United States declare they have blacklisted two companies based in Hong Kong, one in Shanghai and one in Dubai for helping Iran's State-owned National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) export millions of dollars of goods in violation of US sanctions.

January 24th:

Tens of thousands of Iraqis rally in central Baghdad calling for the expulsion of US troops, but the protest mostly dissipates after a few hours despite fears of violence following the *élite* cleric's call for a «million strong» turnout.

January 25th:

Xi Jinping declares China is facing a «grave situation» as the death toll from the coronavirus outbreak jumps to 41, overshadowing celebrations of the Lunar New Year.

January 26th:

Eastern Libya's military commander Khalifa Haftar on Sunday seeks to open a new front by moving forces towards the city of Misrata, which is allied to the internationally recognized government.

January 27th:

Donald Trump offers China whatever help it needs to control a coronavirus outbreak that has killed 81 people, stranded tens of millions during the biggest holiday of the year and rattled global markets.

January 28th:

Donald Trump proposes the creation of a Palestinian State with a capital in Eastern Jerusalem, in an effort to achieve a peace breakthrough with Israel that will be a tough sell for Palestinians.

January 29th:

The European Parliament gives its final approval to Britain's divorce deal from the bloc, paving the way for Brexit to take place on January 31st.

January 30th:

Brexit clears its last formal hurdle in Brussels, setting Britain's January 31st exit from the European Union.

January 31st:

The United Kingdom leaves the European Union with a mixture of joy, anger and indifference.

February 1st:

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declares Palestinian Authority cuts all ties with the United States and Israel, including those relating to security, after rejecting the Middle East peace plan presented by Donald Trump.

February 2nd:

In London police shoots a man dead on a busy South street after three people have been wounded, one critically, in a stabbing attack that police calls terrorism-related.

February 3rd:

In central Uganda in the city of Entebbe Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holds talks with Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of Sudan's sovereign council, deciding to normalize the relations between their two countries.

February 4th:

The European Union rejects parts of Donald Trump's peace plan for the Middle East, prompting an angry response from Israel which strongly backs the US proposal.

February 5th-6th:

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog agency declares Iran has not taken further steps to violate its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers since it has renounced in January all restraints imposed by the agreement.

February 7th:

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro holds talks with Russia's Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov as Moscow continues to support the isolated South American nation's socialist government despite Washington's warnings that it may ramp up sanctions.

February 8th:

Support for left-wing Irish nationalists Sinn Fein surges in an election, leaving its ties with the party of Prime Minister Leo Varadkar but unlikely to emerge with the highest number of seats.

February 9th:

Left-wing Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein demands to be part of the next Irish government after tallies have indicated it secures the most votes in an election that leader Mary Lou McDonald has described as a ballot box «revolution».

February 10th:

Sinn Fein declares it wants a major role in Ireland's next government after a record election showing, a move that would raise its central goal of reunification with Northern Ireland near the top of the agenda in Dublin for the first time.

February 11th:

Shortly after Qassem Soleimani has been killed in a US drone strike in Iraq, the Tehran-backed Lebanese organization Hezbollah urgently meets with Iraqi militia leaders, seeking to unite them in the face of a huge void left by their powerful mentor's death.

February 12th:

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg declares that NATO Defense Ministers have agreed to expand the Western alliance's training mission in Iraq, responding to a demand by Donald Trump for NATO to do more in the Middle East.

February 13th:

US Defence Secretary Mark Esper declares that the United States and the Taliban have negotiated a proposal for a seven-day reduction in violence, which could lead to an eventual withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

February 14th:

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva declares the International Monetary Fund hopes governments and central banks will work on a response to the coronavirus outbreak once the economic impact becomes clear.

February 15th:

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Donald Trump exchange views by phone on an immediate halt to fighting in Syria's Idlib province.

February 16th:

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani declares his country will never hold talks with the United States under pressure, adding that Tehran's help is essential in establishing security in the Middle East.

February 17th:

The Syrian army declares it has taken full control of dozens of towns in Aleppo's Northwestern countryside and it will press on with its campaign to wipe out militant groups «wherever they are found».

February 18th:

The United Nations declare that in Syria government air strikes hit hospitals and refugee camps in the Northwest and kill about 300 civilians as President Bashar al-Assad's forces press an assault against the last rebel stronghold.

February 19th:

Tayyip Erdogan declares a military operation by his forces to push back a Syrian government offensive against rebels in Northwest Syria is now «a matter of time» after talks with Russia have failed to halt the assault.

February 20th:

Turkish forces and Syrian rebels fight government troops in Northwest Syria and Russian warplanes strike back in a sharp escalation of an intense battle over the last rebel bastions.

February 21st:

Hardliners loyal to Iran's supreme leader are likely to sweep the parliamentary election that will cement their grip on power as the country faces mounting US pressure over its nuclear program and growing discontent at home.

February 22nd:

Taliban fighters and Afghan security forces clash in parts of Afghanistan, a day after a week-long «reduction in violence» has been announced, but the incidents do not spark immediate alarm on either side.

February 23rd:

Iran announces a 42% turnout in its parliamentary election, the lowest rate since the 1979 Islamic revolution, while its top leader declares Tehran's enemies play up the new coronavirus threat to dissuade people from voting.

February 24th:

Mahathir Mohamad unexpectedly quits as Malaysia's prime minister, leaving the country in political turmoil, but agrees to a request by the Southeast Asian nation's king to stay on as *interim* premier until a successor is named.

February 25th:

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) alerts Americans to begin preparing for the spread of coronavirus in the United States after the flu-like virus has surfaced in several more countries.

February 26th:

Egypt holds a military funeral for its former president Hosni Mubarak, bestowing the State's final rehabilitation on the man who has ruled for 30 years until he has been ousted in disgrace in the 2011 popular uprising.

February 27th:

Fifty former European Prime Ministers and Foreign Affairs Ministers condemn Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan in an open letter, saying it would create an apartheid-like situation in occupied Palestinian territory.

February 28th:

Refugees in Turkey head towards European frontiers after an official has declared that borders have been thrown open, a response to the escalating war in Syria where 33 Turkish soldiers have been killed by Russian-backed Syrian government troops.

February 29th:

The United States sign a deal with Taliban insurgents that could pave the way toward a full withdrawal of foreign soldiers from Afghanistan and represents a step toward ending the 18-year-war in the nation. The deal is signed in the Qatari capital Doha by US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban political chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on hand to witness the ceremony.

March 1st:

Turkey shoots down two Syrian warplanes over Idlib and strikes a military airport well beyond its frontlines in a sharp escalation of its military operations following the death of dozens of Turkish soldiers.

March 2nd:

Benjamin Netanyahu seeks re-election under the weight of an imminent corruption trial, with voters turning out in high numbers to try to avoid another deadlock after two inconclusive ballots.

March 3rd:

The US Federal Reserve cuts interest rates in an emergency move to shield the world's largest economy from the impact of the coronavirus, as Group of Seven finance officials pledges unspecified «appropriate» policy moves.

March 4th:

Palestinians launch protests in the occupied West Bank after Israeli bulldozers have begun clearing land in what villagers fear is an attempt to confiscate it for future Jewish settlements.

March 5th-6th:

Turkey and Russia agree a ceasefire deal in Syria's Idlib region, after talks in Moscow to contain a conflict which has displaced nearly a million people in three months.

March 7th:

Teargas and smoke bombs cloud a border crossing between Greece and Turkey as tensions persist over thousands of migrants massed at the frontier trying to force their way into the European Union.

March 8th:

Tayyip Erdogan urges Greece to «open your gates» to refugees trying to enter the European Union from Turkey and declares he hopes to win more support on migration from the EU at talks.

March 9th:

The World Health Organization (WHO) declares the coronavirus is closer to causing a pandemic, but outbreaks in countries can still be controlled through a combination of containment and mitigation measures.

March 10th:

Across Italy shops and restaurants are closed, hundreds of flights are canceled and streets are emptied, in the first day of an unprecedented, nationwide lockdown imposed to slow Europe's worst outbreak of coronavirus.

March 11th:

As announced by Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz on March 10th, the border at Brennero has been closed; Austria also has suspended international railways connections.

In Switzerland the custom administration announces the closure of nine secondary passes on the border with Italy, but only to canalize the traffic across major frontiers passages, leaving the Swiss custom authorities able to monitoring the situation at their best.

Italy adds new restrictions to a lockdown imposed to fight the coronavirus, ordering bars, restaurants and beauty parlors to close after the highest daily increase in deaths of any country since the outbreak has begun.

March 12th:

Global markets suffer record falls as alarm over the coronavirus intensifies, and governments from Ireland to Italy unveil new measures to try to slow the spread of a disease that has infected more than 126,000 people worldwide.

March 13th:

After blocking all income flights from Europe on March 12th, Donald Trump declares a national emergency over the fast-spreading coronavirus, opening the door to more federal aid to combat a disease that has infected 138,000 people worldwide and left more than 5,000 dead.

In Austria red zones are created, closing 47 border passes with Italy. Despite the EU judges them as «counterproductive measures» and the European Commissioner to Transports Violeta Bulc guarantees the movement of goods, Slovenia blocks the entrance of Italian tirs. Ucraina, Czech Republic, Danmark and Poland block their borders. Serbia closes its frontier with Romania.

March 14th:

Countries around the world continue to close borders, impose strict entry and quarantine requirements and restrict large gatherings in efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

March 15th:

France and Spain join Italy in imposing lockdowns on tens of millions of people, Australia orders self-isolation of arriving foreigners and other countries extend entry bans as the world seeks to contain the spreading coronavirus.

March 16th:

Bars, restaurants, cinemas and schools are shutting down from New York and Los Angeles to Paris and Dubai in a worldwide effort to combat the coronavirus pandemic, as financial markets tumble despite emergency action by global central banks.

March 17th:

The President of EU Council Charles Michel declares that the leaders of the Union's 27 countries have agreed the proposal of the European Commission to introduce a temporary restriction to all the unnecessary travels across the EU for a period of 30 days, to face the coronavirus and that every State will adopt this measure in a coordinate way.

March 18th:

Great Britain and the European Union exchange draft legal texts containing their proposals for how relations between the two sides should work after the end of a Brexit transition period on December 31st.

March 19th:

The European Parliament is set to approve special measures on March 26th to soften the sudden economic impact of coronavirus, including releasing 37 billion euros (\$39.48 billion) of European Union funds to member governments.

March 20th:

During a videomessage the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announces that the Commission has started up the safeguard clause of the Stability Pact which will allow the governments to «pump in the system liquidity until it is needed» to face the coronavirus emergency.

March 21st:

The death toll from an outbreak of coronavirus in Italy grows by 793 to 4,825, an increase of 19.6% by far the largest daily rise in absolute terms since the contagion has emerged.

March 22nd:

Sergei Lavrov declares that a first aid by airplane Il-76 of the Russia Air Forces has left from the military airport of Chkalovsky with military experts and equipments to Italy to give assistance in the fight against coronavirus.

March 23rd:

The European Union urges its 27 members to unblock their borders and allow freight vehicles to cross from one country to another within 15 minutes to ensure the flow of basic supplies and medical equipments.

March 24th:

The World Health Organization declares that the United States could become the global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, as India announces a full 24-hour, nationwide lockdown in the world's second-most populous country.

March 25th:

In the Afghan capital of Kabul gunmen and suicide bombers raid a Sikh religious complex killing 25 people before security forces have killed all of the attackers.

March 26th:

The Italian government rejects the EU Council's draft where there is a reference to the European Mechanism of Stability. The Italian president of Council Giuseppe Conte declares that he gives 10 days to the Union to «knock a beat» and find an adequate solution to the serious emergency that all the European countries are living in agreement with the Spanish *premier* Sanchez, clarifying that nobody thinks about a mutualization of the public debt because every country answers for its own public debt and will continue to do this. Conte's declarations find the support of the French president Emmanuel Macron, the Portuguese Antonio Costa, the Greek Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the Irish Leo Varadkar, the Luxembourg Xavier Bettel.

March 27th:

Europe remains divided on the eurobonds as measure to face the economic emergency caused by coronavirus and tries to find a complicated compromise, trusting in the forthcoming meeting of the Eurogroup on April 7th.

March 28th:

Emmanuel Macron declares that «France is by the Italian side» and that ten countries of the Eurozone, representing the 60% of its GNP, clearly support the project of coronabonds, or the increase of EU's balance to help the most urging countries because of the pandemic. Some States, such as Germany, express their reticence.

March 29th:

South Korean Command of the General Staff declares that North Korea has launched two ballistic, short range rockets towards Japanese Sea, adding that «in such a situation, during which the world is facing great difficulties with Covid-19 pandemic, these are to be considered as inadequate military actions» .

March 30th:

The Hungarian Parliament votes to devolve full powers to the premier Viktor Orban to face the crisis caused by coronavirus.

The European Central Bank supports the use of coronabonds but the Union remains divided on the measures to face the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

March 31st:

Ursula von der Leyen declares that the European Commission follows with attention the situation in Hungary and states that the eventual measures of emergency adopted by the European Union's governments to face the coronavirus pandemic would not be at the expense of «our fundamental values of respect of freedom of expression and of legal certainty» .