

Quarterly Review of International Relations

January-March 2018

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January 1st:

Kim Jong-un warns the United States he has a «nuclear button» on his desk ready for use if North Korea is threatened, but offers an olive branch to South Korea, saying he is «open to dialogue» with Seoul.

January 2nd :

The US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley warns North Korea against staging another missile test and declares Washington will not take any talks between North and South Korea seriously if they do not do something to get Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons.

January 3rd – 4th:

Iran's *élite* Revolutionary Guards deploy forces to three provinces to put down an eruption of anti-government unrest after six days of protests that have rattled the clerical leadership and left 21 people dead. Iranian army commander offers to help police to suppress the unrest.

January 5th:

North Korea agrees to open a «high level» dialogue with South Korea to be held on January 9th, to talk on the possible participation of a North Korean delegation to the Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang (February 9th - 25th) and on options to improve their bilateral relations.

January 6th:

Thousands of government supporters stage rallies in Iran for a fourth day, in a backlash against widespread protests that the clerical establishment has blamed on the country's enemies.

January 7th:

US President Donald Trump declares that he will «absolutely» speak at the phone with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un that he hopes in positives outcomes in the dialogue between two Koreas.

January 8th:

Against his inflexible rivals, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani declares the young protesters are only unsatisfied of the economic reforms and that they will not long accept the lifestyle and the goals of an old revolutionary *élite*.

January 9th - 10th:

From the high level meeting held after more than two years in the village of Panmunjom between the two countries' delegations, the two Koreas agree on the military dialogue to «loosen tension along the borders», to start operative meetings on the participation of North Korea to the Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang and to re-open the 'red line' of military communication.

January 11th:

In the final declaration of the Rome summit, leaders of the South Countries of EU adopt the proposal of French President Emmanuel Macron to call popular consultation all over the European Union since spring 2018 to consult the citizens on the future of EU.

January 12th:

US President Donald Trump reluctantly renounces to apply US sanctions against Iran but declares that this is the last time of this decision until the 2015 agreement with the country will be reinforced to inhibit nuclear and ballistic programs of Teheran.

January 13th

Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an announcement cited by Irna agency declares that Iran will never accept any change on the nuclear agreement signed with the international community in 2015,

defined «not negotiable».

January 14th:

Foreign Affairs Ministers of 20 nations will meet in Vancouver on January 16th to discuss on how to stop North Korean nuclear program through diplomatic and financial pressure but China will not take part to the summit.

January 15th:

In Baghdad a double attack provokes 38 dead and at least 100 injured people. Iraqi authorities do not exclude this could be a terroristic attack by ISIS.

January 16th:

20 nations taking part to Vancouver meeting on North Korea declare that the pressure of sanctions on Pyongyang must be maintained to force it to abandon its nuclear army program.

January 17th - 18th:

After a new round of dialogues to restore bilateral relations, the two Koreas declare they will form a mixed team of women's hockey and will march together under a unique flag at the Olympic Winter Games to be held in South Korea.

January 19th:

During the joint conference in Paris with German Chancellor Angela Merkel French President Emmanuel Macron declares that European challenges «are copious and need immediate answers».

January 20th - 21st:

In the Afghan capital Kabul a group of four gunmen attack the Intercontinental Hotel, seizing hostages and exchanging fire with security forces as the building caught fire and residents and staff fled. Taliban claim the attack.

January 22nd:

Turkey and Syrian militias backed by Ankara in North-West Syria open a new front in the offensive ground against Kurdish-Syrian *enclave* in Afrin.

January 23rd - 24th:

In Jalalabad, Eastern Afghanistan, a terroristic attack against the ONG Save the Children causes the death of two people (a soldier and a civilian) and 14 injured. ISIS claims the attack.

January 25th:

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, after being strongly criticized for his protectionism by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, US President Donald Trump, alongside a meeting with Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu, declares that Palestinians must come back to the negotiable rounds if they want to receive US aids.

January 26th:

At the World Economic Forum in Davos US President Donald Trump intervenes with a speech on «America first» and on protectionist policies.

January 27th:

In the Afghan capital Kabul a bomb hidden in an ambulance kills at least 95 people and wounds about 158, blowing up at a police checkpoint in a crowded part of the city. Taliban claim the attack.

January 28th:

In an interview with the journalist Piers Morgan US President Donald Trump declares that the USA would join again the Paris agreement on climate changes if this could be «a good agreement for the United States».

January 29th:

In Kabul a terroristic attack at the military academy by 4 gunmen causes 10 death and 10 injured people. The act is thought to be made by militants of the radical net Haqqani, close to the Taliban of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

January 30th:

US Treasury let be known the 'Putin-list', containing the names of Russian subjects close to President Vladimir Putin which could be subjected to sanctions. In the list appear 210 names, 114 of politicians

and 96 of oligarchs.

January 31st:

In his first speech on the state of the Union to the two Houses, US President Donald Trump declares that: «This is our new American moment», opening to the Democrats' opposition on various issues.

February 1st:

According to US officials, the Syrian government may be developing new types of chemical weapons, and US President Donald Trump is prepared to order a new military action against Syrian *leader* Bashar al-Assad's forces if necessary to deter chemical attacks.

February 2nd:

The Pentagon outlines and spreads the nuclear Trump doctrine in the Nuclear Posture Review which, forecasting an arsenal's expansion, ends the precedent president Obama era, based on the containment of US nuclear potential and the role of nuclear weapons in the US defense policy. The Trump administration focuses on Russia and China as potential antagonists.

February 3rd:

Russian Foreign Affairs ministry declares that the outlines of the new nuclear doctrine of USA contains «a high grade of hostility against Russia and an anti-Russian orientation».

February 4th:

Iran accuses the United States of threatening Russia with new atomic weapons after Washington has published the Nuclear Posture Review, where it plans to expand its nuclear capabilities to deter others.

February 5th:

EU chief negotiator Michael Barnier declares that for Great Britain: «it's time to make a choice», referring to Brexit and customs union, warning that if London will decide to leave also this last one and the single market there will be: «unavoidable trade barriers with the European Union».

February 6th:

The United Nations call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Syria of at least a month, as heavy air strikes are reported to have killed scores of people in the last major rebel stronghold near Damascus.

February 7th:

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is to launch a major push for disarmament talks covering everything from nuclear and cyber war to small arms, braving certain US resistance.

February 8th:

During his speech at the military parade for the 70 years of army foundation in Pyongyang Northkorean leader Kim Jong-un promises to «support military preparations at a high level».

February 9th:

US Vice President Mike Pence makes only a brief appearance at a reception marking the start of the Winter Olympics, avoiding a potentially awkward encounter with the ceremonial leader of North Korea attending the same event.

February 10th:

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un invites South Korean President Moon Jae-in for talks in Pyongyang, setting the stage for the first meeting of Korean leaders in more than 10 years.

February 11th-12th:

The United States will be looking more favorably at diplomatic engagement with North Korea, possibly holding dialogue, as South Korea pushes forward with plans to establish grounds for a rare summit between the two Koreas.

February 13th-14th:

Israeli police calls for the incrimination of premier Benjamin Netanyahu for corruption while ex premier Ehdu Barak tells Netanyahu should declare himself «unable to conduct his role» and that «government coalition will decide who is going to substitute him».

February 15th-16th:

Turkey proposes staging a joint deployment with US troops in Syria, as the two NATO allies sought to rescue a rapidly deteriorating strategic relationship that Washington acknowledged had reached a

«crisis point».

February 17th:

US National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster declares that, despite denials, public reports show that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has used chemical weapons, and adds that it is time for the international community to hold the Syrian government to account.

February 18th:

In his first address to the annual Munich Security Conference, which draws security and defense officials and diplomats from across Europe and the United States, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares that Israel can act against Iran itself, not just its allies in the Middle East, after border incidents occurred in Syria.

February 19th:

Turkey warns it will confront Syrian government forces if they enter Syria's northwestern Afrin region to help the Kurdish YPG militia repel a Turkish offensive.

February 20th:

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan confirms Afrin's artillery has repelled a convoy of militia pro Assad in the Kurdish *enclave* of Afrin, warning that Turkey will not permit any other «wrong steps of this type» in the future.

February 21st:

According to official sources, European Union leaders will issue guidelines for chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier in March 2018 on the future relationship he should negotiate with Britain, regardless of whether London clarifies what it wants.

February 22nd:

Warplanes pound the last rebel *enclave* near Damascus for a fifth day running as the UN Security Council considers demanding a 30-day ceasefire across the country to allow emergency aid deliveries and medical evacuations.

February 23rd:

The United States declare it will open its embassy to Israel in Jerusalem in May 2018, a move from Tel Aviv that reverses decades of US policy and is bound to trouble US allies who have already objected.

February 24th:

UN Security Council obtains a 30-day ceasefire in Syria after that more than 500 people have died in the last 7 days for airplane raids all over the country.

February 25th:

The White House declares that any talks with North Korea must lead to an end to its nuclear program after senior officials from Pyongyang visiting South Korea have said their government is open to talks with the United States.

February 26th:

South Korean President Moon Jae-in declares the United States and North Korea must both give ground so they can sit down to talks to try to resolve the crisis over North Korea's weapons programs.

February 27th:

At the end of the General Affairs Council on Brexit, UE chief negotiator Michel Barnier declares that remarkable divergences still remain with Great Britain on the transition period after London's divorce from the Union.

February 28th – March 1st:

The European Union lays out how it will regulate Northern Ireland's trade if no better solution will be found in the fast-closing window before Britain's departure from the EU, prompting furious reactions in London and Belfast.

March 2nd:

British Prime Minister Theresa May urges the European Union to show more flexibility in talks on a future relationship after Brexit, saying Great Britain has realized it cannot get all it wants but believes an ambitious trade deal is still possible.

March 3rd:

The Kremlin considers sanctions against Russia, imposed by Washington for the situation in Ukraine and extended for more than one year, as out of law.

March 4th:

At the usual dinner with journalists of Washington's Gridiron Club, US president Donald Trump declares that he does not exclude to talk soon at the telephone with Pyongyang regime's leader Kim Jong-un.

March 5th:

Arrived for a visit in the North, aimed to encourage the dialogue between USA and North Korea, a South Korean delegation meets North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

March 6th:

The two Koreas agree to set up a summit between their leaders, Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in, at the end of April 2018 and Pyongyang wants to suspend its nuclear and missile program with a 'moratorium' during the North-South dialogue. Furthermore North Korea declares that it wants to open a direct dialogue with the United States for denuclearization.

March 7th:

South Korean president Moon Jae-in affirms he believes it is «too soon to be optimistic» on the development of relations with the North and on the process of denuclearization.

March 8th:

Announcing custom duties on steel and aluminum, Donald Trump confirms duties of 25% on the first and 10% on the second, but reserving the right to raise them up or down in every moment and to exclude single countries.

March 9th:

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un asks through Seoul a meeting with US president Donald Trump, with the commitment to the denuclearization and to the suspension of nuclear and missile tests.

March 10th:

After meetings in Brussels with Japanese Trade Ministry Hiroshige Seko and US Trade representative Robert Lighthizer, EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstroem declares that, being a close US partner for security and trade, European Union must be excluded from protectionist measures announced by president Trump.

March 11th - 12th:

In Beijing Chinese National People's Congress approves almost unanimously to remove the limit of two presidential mandates established by the Constitution, opening the way to president Xi Jinping to obtain a life office.

March 13th - 14th:

Turkish army starts a siege in urban Afrin's centre, the Kurdish *enclave* in North-West Syria against which it leads a military offensive since January 20th, 2018.

March 15th:

Thousands of Syrian civilians flee from a rebel pocket in eastern Ghouta, crossing by foot through army positions in the first mass exodus from the besieged *enclave* since Syrian government forces launched its assault.

March 16th:

South Korea declares it is seeking high-level talks with North Korea to prepare for a summit and that South Korean President Moon Jae-in can meet Donald Trump before the US president's planned meeting with the North Korean leader.

March 17th:

China's largely rubber-stamp Parliament, joined in the 13th People's National Congress, unanimously re-elects Xi Jinping as the PCR's president for the third consecutive mandate.

March 18th:

The main rebel group in the Southern pocket of Syria's opposition-held eastern Ghouta declares it is

negotiating with a United Nations delegation about a ceasefire, aid and the evacuation of urgent medical cases.

March 19th:

Britain and the European Union agree to a transition period to avoid a 'cliff edge' Brexit in 2019, though only after London has accepted a potential solution for the border with the Irish Republic that may face stiff opposition at home.

March 20th:

In Damascus at least 35 people are killed when a rocket hits a busy market place in an Eastern suburb of the Syrian capital, while rescuers declare Syrian and Russian airstrikes kill dozens in nearby rebel-held areas.

March 21st:

In Kabul at least 26 people die because of a strong explosion caused by a suspected suicide bomber, close to the sanctuary of Kar-e-Sakhi and to the University. ISIS claims the attack.

March 22nd:

US trade representative Robert Lighthizer declares at the US Congress that President Donald Trump has decided to suspend at the moment trade customs on steel and aluminum with European Union, Australia Argentina, South Korea and Brazil.

March 23rd:

In Trebes, Southwestern France, a gunman kills three people as he has hold up a car, has fired on police and has seized hostages in a supermarket, screaming «*Allah akbar*». ISIS claims the attack.

March 24th:

North Korea agrees to hold high-level talks with South Korea on March 29th at the border truce village of Panmunjom to prepare for a summit of their leaders planned for April 2018.

March 25th:

Former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont is detained in Germany, five months after entering self-imposed exile from Spain, where he faces up to 25 years in prison for organizing an illegal secession referendum in 2017.

March 26th:

North Korea leader Kim Jong-un visits China, in his first known trip abroad since taking power in 2011 and ahead of a potential summit with US President Donald Trump.

March 27th - 28th:

US president Donald Trump declares that he has received a message from Chinese president Xi Jinping of China that his meeting with Kim Jong-un went very well and that Kim looks forward to his meeting with Trump.

March 29th:

North and South Korea will hold their first summit on April 27th 2018, after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has pledged his commitment to denuclearization as tensions ease between the old foes.

March 30th:

In Palestine 14 Palestinian protesters are killed during violent clashes with Israeli army along defense barrier between Gaza and the Jewish State.

March 31st:

The Syrian army command declares it has regained most of the towns and villages in Eastern Ghouta and is pressing its military operations in the last rebel bastion of Douma.