

Quarterly Review of International Relations

October – December 2018

CHIARA D'AURIA

October 1st:

US Commerce Representative Robert Lighthizer and Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland announce in a joint declaration the new agreement between USA, Canada and Mexico (USMCA) which substitutes NAFTA.

October 2nd:

Italian Foreign Affairs Minister Enzo Moavero Milanesi declares that on November 12th-13th will be held in Palermo a conference between Libyan interlocutors and members of the international community on the situation in the country.

October 3rd:

At the end of the Tories' congress in Birmingham, British Prime Minister Theresa May declares that Great Britain has "no fear" of a 'no deal' Brexit, «if necessary», asking to its counterpart «respect» and adding that she «will never accept» an agreement to divide Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom or to «betray 2016 referendum».

In the meantime she warns on consequences of a 'no deal' divorce for commerce and economy, insisting on her enlarged free trade agreement's plan with Brussels.

October 4th-5th:

The European Union's Brexit negotiators believe a divorce deal with Britain is «very close», and a compromise on the most contentious issue - the future Irish border - might be in the making though details are scarce.

October 6th:

French police are investigating the disappearance of Interpol chief, Meng Hongwei, who is reported missing after traveling from France to his native China, while his wife has been placed under police protection after receiving threats.

October 7th:

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo agree to arrange a second leaders summit «as soon as possible», and discuss potential US monitoring of Pyongyang's steps toward denuclearization.

October 8th:

China declares it is investigating former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei for bribery and other violations.

October 9th:

Kim Eui-kyeom, spokesman of South Korean Presidency, in a briefing on president Moon Jae-in's trip in Europe (which includes a stop-over in Italy and in the Vatican City from October 16th to 18th 2018) declares that Kim Jong-un invites Pope Francis to visit Pyongyang saying to be ready to «house him fervently». Moon will deliver this message when he will meet the Pope, whom he will ask the benediction and the support for peace and stability in the Korean peninsula.

October 10th-11th:

Mike Pompeo expresses «discontent» with an inter-Korean military pact reached during September 2018's summit, in a rare disclosure of signs of disagreement with its US ally.

October 12th:

Theresa May struggles to find consensus on a Brexit plan that will be acceptable to her ministers, her divided Conservative Party and the Northern Irish lawmakers who prop up her minority government.

October 13th:

US Pastor Andrew Brunson, jailed in Turkey in 2016 and in house arrest since July 2018, with the accuse of links to Kurdish militants and supporters of Fethullah Gulen, is flown out of Turkey after a court has freed him, in a step that can improve US - Turkish ties strained by disputes over Syria, Iran and Ankara's planned purchase of Russian military equipment.

October 14th:

The ambassadors of the 27 European member States are convened in Brussels for an extraordinary summit on Brexit and by surprise a meeting between British Minister for Brexit Dominic Raab and EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier takes place there. However an agreement on Brexit is not found.

October 15th:

An investigation by the British TV broadcaster BBC reveals that from 2014 to 2018 would have been launched in Syria 106 chemical attacks against civilians. The report underlines that, after 7 years of devastating civil war with more than 350.000 victims, president Bashar al-Assad «seems to be close to the victory against the forces that aim to dispossess him».

October 16th - 17th - 18th:

At the European Union leaders summit in Brussels Theresa May declares she believes a Brexit deal is still possible as she arrives to meet her European Union counterparts, after talks have stalled over how to manage the Irish border.

October 19th:

In Brussels takes place the Asem, the summit between the European Union and the Association of South East Asian Countries (Asean), which aims to more dynamic relations between Asian countries and the European Union, in light of a deeper cooperation that could be framed in the respect of multilateralism, market rules, international rules to guarantee transparency and no-discrimination.

October 20th:

Hundreds of thousands of supporters of the European Union march through London in the biggest demonstration so far to demand that the British government holds a public vote on the terms of Brexit.

October 21st:

Dominic Raab declares that Great Britain can accept extending the post-Brexit transition period by a few months if the European Union drops its proposals for a so-called Northern Irish backstop.

October 22nd:

After Donald Trump's announcement on the US unilateral exit from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (Inf), negotiated in 1987 by US president Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Michail Gorbaciov (that sanctioned the elimination of nuclear missiles in Europe), China, Russia and the European Union express their disappointment.

October 23rd:

The European Commission rejects Italy's draft 2019 budget, saying it brazenly has broken EU rules on public spending, and asks Rome to submit a new one within three weeks or face disciplinary action. It is the first time that the Commission is obliged to request a euro area country to revise its draft budget plan.

October 24th:

According to international observers, the uncompromising challenge to EU budget rules by Italy is providing the first big test for reforms introduced to save the euro zone in 2009 as financial crisis threatened to tear it apart.

October 25th:

After NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has laid the blame on Russia for violating the treaty by developing the SSC-8 (a land-based, intermediate-range Cruise missile which also has the name of Novator 9M729), European members of the Alliance urge the United States to try to bring Russia back into compliance with a nuclear arms control treaty rather than quit it, seeking to avoid a split in the alliance that Moscow could exploit.

October 26th:

Russia fails to get the UN General Assembly to consider calling on Washington and Moscow to preserve and strengthen the arms control treaty that helps end the Cold War and warns that if the United States quits the pact it could raise the issue in the UN Security Council.

October 27th:

Hassan Rouhani says that the United States are isolated among their traditional allies in their confrontation with Iran, and that even Europe is siding with Tehran against the reintroduction of US sanctions.

October 28th:

In Istanbul the leaders of Russia, Germany, France and Turkey stress the importance of a lasting ceasefire in Syria, and declare a committee to create a new constitution should meet by the end of 2018.

October 29th:

Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right former Army captain, wins Brazil's presidential election. Angela Merkel declares she will not seek re-election as party chairwoman and that her fourth term as chancellor will be her last. Her decision to step down as chairwoman comes after her party has suffered its second regional election setback in the state of Hesse, followed by a strong CDU defeat occurred in Bavaria on October 15th 2018.

October 30th:

During an audience in Washington Marshall Billingslea, assistant secretary for terrorist financing at the Treasury Department, declares that Venezuela poses a clear threat to regional stability and could drag down key US allies like Brazil, Argentina and Colombia.

October 31st:

According to Austrian press agency Apa, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and his vice Heinz-Christian Strache declare that Austrian government will not sign the Global Compact (the UN agreement on migrations, whose text has been finalized in July 2018), which will be formally approved on December 11th-12th 2018 in Marrakech, because of fears on Austrian sovereignty for immigration policies and on a possible dilution of the difference between legal and illegal immigration.

November 1st:

The United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly adopts its 27th annual resolution calling for an end to the US economic embargo on Cuba after a failed bid by Washington to amend the text to push Cuba to improve its human rights record.

November 2nd:

United States declare they will temporarily allow eight importers to keep buying Iranian oil when they reintroduce sanctions (all the ones suspended with the signature of the nuclear agreement in 2015) from November 5th 2018 to try to force Iran to curb its nuclear, missile and regional activities.

November 3rd:

Egyptian Christians bury six members of the same family who have been shot dead while returning from a baptism at a Coptic monastery in Egypt's Minya province, when two buses have been attacked on November 2nd 2018 near the Monastery of St. Samuel the Confessor in Minya. Seven people have been killed and 18 wounded, including children.

November 4th:

Thousands of Iranians chanting «Death to America» rally to mark the anniversary of the seizure of the US Embassy during the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the imminent reintroduction of US sanctions on Iran's oil sector.

November 5th:

The United States restore sanctions targeting Iran's oil, banking and transport sectors and threaten more action to stop its «outlaw» policies, steps the Islamic Republic has called economic warfare and vows to defy.

November 6th:

In the United States take place the Midterm elections which will renew the Congress. These elections concern 435 members of the House of Representatives and one third of the 100 Senate's members

(alternately 33 or 34), the governors of 36 of the 50 member States of the Union. Furthermore are elected in this occasion the members of the legislative assemblies of the member States and county institutions for a two years' mandate.

November 7th:

The outcomes of US Midterm elections confer the majority of the seats at the House of Representatives to the Democratic Party, while at the Senate Republicans prevail. In addition to the high affluence to the seats, these elections are characterized for the record number of elected women: at least 99 women will become Congress members (on 237 feminine candidates). Within them there is the 29-years-old Democratic Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the youngest woman ever elected in the US Congress; the Democratic Rashida Tlaib, daughter of immigrants from Palestine, the first Muslim woman to be elected in the Congress; and the Democratic Sharice Davids, the first native-American woman in the Congress.

November 8th:

Prime Minister Theresa May steps up attempts to court European support for a Brexit deal as negotiations on securing a smooth British divorce from the world's biggest trading bloc enter their final stages.

November 9th:

During a high level speech Mike Pompeo and US Defense Secretary James Mattis urge Chinese Communist Party Office of Foreign Affairs Director Yang Jiechi to halt China's militarization of the disputed South China Sea, drawing a rebuke from Beijing for sending US warships and planes close to islands claimed by China in the strategic waterway.

November 10th:

In Paris, at the commemoration for the end of WW1, Donald Trump and France's President Emmanuel Macron agree on the need for more European defense spending, papering over an earlier Trump tweet that has described Macron's call for a European army as «very insulting».

November 11th:

After a terroristic attack claimed by ISIS in Melbourne on November 9th 2018, Italian diplomatic authorities and the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs declare the identity of the victim, stabbed by an attacker of Somali origins killed by the police: the well-known restaurateur of Italian origins Sisto Malaspina.

November 12th:

The rulers of Libya's rival East and West are expected to meet for the first time in more than five months at a summit in Palermo, Italy, a week after the United Nations has abandoned plans to hold an election on December 2018.

November 13th:

Britain strikes a draft divorce deal with the European Union after more than a year of talks, thrusting Theresa May into a perilous battle over Brexit that can shape her country's prosperity for generations to come.

At the summit in Libya in Palermo Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Libyan General Khalifa Belqasim Haftar and the Chief of National Government Fayeze al-Sarraj hold their hands but a new roadmap for the country is not founded.

Turkish delegation leaves the conference in advance declaring to be disappointed.

November 14th:

Theresa May wins the backing of her senior ministers for a draft European Union divorce deal, freeing her to tackle the much more perilous struggle of getting Parliament to approve the agreement.

November 15th:

Just over 12 hours after May has announced that her cabinet has agreed to the terms of the deal, Brexit minister Dominic Raab and work and pensions minister Esther McVey resign. Hostility from government and opposition lawmakers raise the risk that the deal would be rejected in Parliament, and that Britain could leave the EU on March 29th 2019 without a safety net.

That prospect pushes the pound down.

May calls a news conference at her Downing Street residence to underline her determination to stay the course.

November 16th:

Theresa May wins the backing of the most prominent Brexiteer in her government as she has fought to save a draft European Union divorce deal that has stirred up a plot to force her out of job.

November 17th:

US Vice President Mike Pence declares that United States will not back down from its trade dispute with China, and might even double its tariffs, unless Beijing bows to US demands.

November 18th:

In Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, the APEC summit on tariffs politics and on the competition of influence spheres on the Pacific area between USA and China ends without an agreement on a final joint declaration of the 21 member countries after deep tensions during the works.

November 19th:

Theresa May vows to stick to her draft of European Union divorce deal as dissenting lawmakers in her own party have tried to trigger a leadership challenge.

November 20th:

In Kabul a suicide bomber blows himself up in a banqueting hall where Islamic religious scholars have gathered, killing more than 50 people.

November 21st:

The European Commission says the Italian budget does not comply with the EU debt reduction criteria and that an excessive deficit procedure is warranted. Rome has made no significant changes in the revised budget it submitted to Brussels. In the meantime the European Commission focuses on the possibility of compromise between the two sides.

November 22nd:

Great Britain and the European Union agree on a draft text setting out a close post-Brexit relationship, though the future of Gibraltar must still be settled before EU leaders meet on November 25th 2018.

November 23rd:

Spanish reservations over Gibraltar prevent the European Union clearing the last hurdle before the summit that is due to endorse the bloc's Brexit deal with Great Britain.

November 24th:

A last-minute deal to meet Spanish demands for a say on the future of Gibraltar after Great Britain leaves the EU salvages the European leaders summit which will go ahead as planned on November 25th 2018.

November 25th:

European Union leaders finally seal a Brexit deal, saying the package agreed with Theresa May is the best Great Britain will get in a warning to the British Parliament not to reject it.

November 26th:

Russia ignores Western calls to release three Ukrainian naval ships it has fired on and captured near Crimea and accuses Kiev of plotting with its Western allies to provoke a conflict.

November 27th:

Several senior European politicians raise the possibility of new sanctions against Russia to punish it for capturing three Ukrainian vessels at sea, an incident the West fears could ignite a wider conflict.

November 28th:

In Crimea the courts of Kerch and Simferopolis order the arrest of the 24 sailors of the three Ukraine ships (two war units and a tug boat) halted on November 25th 2018 between the Black Sea and the Azov Sea, including the three people wounded in the fire clash and hospitalized, causing the protests of the European Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis who reaffirms that: «the European Union will not recognize the annexation of Crimea made by Russia».

November 29th:

In Buenos Aires G20 members' nations are struggling to reach agreement on major issues including international trade, migration and climate change as world leaders begin arriving ahead of the summit starting on November 30th.

November 30th:

In Buenos Aires the leaders of the 20 world's largest economies open talks overshadowed by Donald Trump's threat to escalate tariffs on imports from China as well as military tensions between Russia and Ukraine.

December 1st:

The leaders at the G20 back an overhaul of the global body that regulates international trade disputes, ahead of high-stakes talks between Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping aiming at defusing the trade war occurred between the two countries.

December 2nd:

China and the United States agree to a ceasefire in their bitter trade war after talks in Argentina's G20 between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, including no escalated tariffs on January 1st 2019.

December 3rd:

On the bilateral summit held in Buenos Aires alongside the G20 with Xi Jinping, Donald Trump announces that China has agreed to reduce duties on automobiles imported from the USA, which are actually at 40%.

December 4th:

The Minister of Energy of Qatar Saad al-Kaabi announces that on January 2019 his country will leave OPEC, specifying that Qatar, the eleventh oil producer in the Organization and the most relevant exporting country of natural gas, has decided to focus on gas production.

December 5th:

Theresa May's Brexit deal comes under fire from allies and opponents alike after the government has been forced to publish legal advice showing the United Kingdom could be locked indefinitely in the European Union's orbit.

December 6th:

British Parliament's vote on Theresa May's Brexit deal will go ahead on December 11th, rejecting the premier suggestions from expert lawmakers that she should seek ways to avoid a defeat so big it might bring down the government.

December 7th:

In Milan, alongside the OSCE summit, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergej Lavrov declares that the 24 Ukrainian sailors are protected by the Treaties on Human Rights and that they will be taken to trial according to Russian laws because they have been illegally sailing on Russian seawaters.

December 8th-9th:

In Katowice, Poland, at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations (COP24), scientists and many delegates are shocked as the US, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Kuwait objected 'welcoming' the report on the impacts of a temperature rise of 1.5C.

December 10th:

Theresa May postpones the parliamentary vote on her Brexit deal to seek more concessions but the European Union refuses to renegotiate and lawmakers doubt her chances of winning big changes.

December 11th:

Angela Merkel rules out further negotiations on Brexit but declares efforts are made to give Great Britain reassurances.

A terroristic attack occurs in the center of the French city of Strasbourg on the German border, leaving at least one dead and three injured.

December 12th:

Theresa May promises to step down before the next parliamentary election due in 2022, hoping to win over wavering lawmakers before a no confidence vote triggered by Brexiteers in her Conservative Party.

French Police searches through Eastern France for Cherif Chekatt, suspected of killing at least two people in the gun attack on the Christmas market in Strasbourg occurred on December 11th, who is known to the French police to have been religiously radicalized while in jail.

December 13th:

In Brussels at the summit of EU leaders Theresa May appeals to them for concessions to help her win support in Parliament for the January 7th 2019's vote for the deal on Brexit.

Cherif Chekatt is killed by police in Strasbourg, ending his 48-hours on the run. ISIS claims the attack.

December 14th:

In Brussels the European Union leaders take a step toward deeper euro zone integration to help prevent future crises, but deep disagreement leaves key issues like a euro zone budget and a deposit guarantee scheme still unresolved.

December 15th-16th:

In Brussels two demonstrations paralyze the center of the city: a first one, organized by extreme right wing groups and right wing associations to protest against the Global compact (approved on December 10th 2018 in Marrakech) has caused clashes with police. At the same time, some thousands of demonstrators are marching peacefully against racism.

December 17th:

At the House of Commons Theresa May confirms that she will not convene immediately a Parliament vote on her Brexit deal: «We will come back to discuss on it on January 7th 2019 and we will vote it on the following week». Labor Party's leader Jeremy Corbyn presents against May a confidence motion.

December 18th:

The British government declares it will implement plans for a no-deal Brexit in full and begins telling businesses and citizens to prepare for the risk of leaving the European Union without an agreement.

December 19th:

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte heralds a budget deal with the European Commission, saying the long-awaited accord has allowed his government to honor its main commitments and boost the economy.

December 20th:

In Moscow, during his end of the year press conference with 1.700 journalists and 4 hours long, Vladimir Putin underlines the «debacle» of the system of international deterrence, sharpened by the US decision to leave the INF treaty declaring that: «the world is underestimating the risk of a nuclear war».

December 21st:

The United Nations Security Council unanimously approves the deployment of a UN advance team to monitor a ceasefire in Yemen's Hodeidah region after days of wrangling that have pitted the United States against ally Great Britain.

December 22nd:

US Congress does not reach an agreement on Donald Trump's request to allocate 5 billion dollars to build the wall on the border with Mexico, causing the partial shutdown. This closure – the third one in 2018 – is related to one fourth of the Federal agencies, including the ones for national security, transports, agriculture, justice and national parks.

December 23rd:

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Donald Trump agree to coordinate to prevent an authority vacuum from developing as the United States withdraws from Syria, a decision that has sparked criticism from US lawmakers, including fellow Republicans.

December 24th:

In Kabul, Afghanistan, a suicide bomber and a commando of gunmen assault a governmental palace, besieging it for eight hours and causing at least 43 victims. Afghan police authorities suspect it is a fundamentalist attack.

December 25th-26th:

A suicide attack occurs in Tripoli, Libya, against the Foreign Affairs Minister. According to Libyan security sources, three people have been killed in the attack; according to some witnesses, the explosion has been combined by some gunshots. ISIS claims the attack.

December 27th:

Alarmed by a US decision to leave Syria, Kurdish leaders who have run much of the North are urging Russia and its ally Damascus to send forces to shield the border from the threat of a Turkish offensive.

December 28th:

The Syrian army deploys forces near Manbij in Northern Syria, after the Kurdish YPG militia has urged Damascus to protect the town, where US forces operate, from the threat of a Turkish offensive.

December 29th:

US commanders planning for the withdrawal of US troops from Syria are recommending that Kurdish fighters battling Islamic State be allowed to keep US-supplied weapons, a move that would likely anger NATO ally Turkey.

December 30th:

Iraq's prime minister Adel Abdul Madhi meets Bashar al-Assad in Damascus and hints at a bigger Iraqi role fighting Islamic State militants as US troops withdraw from Syria.

December 31st:

Donald Trump confirms on Twitter his decision to withdraw US troops from Syria but implies that the withdrawal will not be rapid as announced and that US troops will keep on fighting what rests of ISIS, as suggested by senator Lindsey Graham after his meeting with the President at the White House.