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President Zuzana Caputova invites Smer party leader Robert Fico to try to form a new government. She is also suing him for defamation. Photograph: Vladimír Šimiček/AFP/Getty Images

Slovakia's New Prime Minister Robert Fico

By Sarah Cernikova

On the 25th of October, Robert Fico was announced as the new prime minister of Slovakia. However, his re-election is causing concern about the future of European foreign policy. The recent parliamentary elections in Slovakia were crucial for the cohesion of the European Union, and Fico's victory with the social democratic party SMER-SD is not seen as a positive result for the European community and its future foreign policy.

Fico is known for his extremist views and criticism towards the USA and the European Union. He has also opposed military aid to Ukraine and the West's sanctions on Russia. This is causing some concern as it seems to align more with the views of Hungary rather than the European Union as a whole. Fico's stance in the European Council is expected to be like that of Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán. On his first full day in office, Fico stated that he would oppose more European sanctions on Russia or military aid to Ukraine and described the war in Ukraine as a conflict between Washington and Moscow. He even went as far as to suggest that the European Union is contributing to the killing of people in Ukraine by sending military aid there.

The future of European unity is dependent on how close the relationship between Fico and Orbán will be. At this time of multiple international crises, this tandem is not sending a good message to Brussels.



Chinese Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission Zhang Youxia and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu arrive at the Xiangshan Forum in Beijing on Monday. (Pedro Pardo/AFP/Getty Images)

Diplomatic Complexity: From Australia-US Relations to UN Debates on Hamas

By Ondrej Pragr

In the realm of international diplomacy, two significant narratives unfold. First, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's official visit to Washington underscores key policy areas of mutual interest between Australia and the United States. Notably, there is concern regarding the passage of crucial legislation underpinning the Aukus nuclear-powered submarine pact, which still needs to be determined. As China's influence in the Pacific region grows, both nations aim to ensure US focus and engagement in the area, reflecting the strategic importance of stability.

Second, at the UN, the US envoy accused Arab states of enabling Hamas by presenting a draft resolution calling for restraint from Israel without explicitly naming Hamas as the instigators of the October 7 attacks. The international debate highlights the challenges of reaching a collective view, with the UN Security Council facing vetoes. In contrast, the UN General Assembly seeks to convey a clear public condemnation of Israel's response, emphasizing international humanitarian law.

These parallel narratives underscore the complexities of global diplomacy as nations grapple with regional stability, strategic interests, and international dynamics.

NATO and the Xiangshan Forum in China

By Sarah Cernikova

On Sunday, October 29th, China held its annual main conference to showcase its military diplomacy. The conference aimed to make the world a safer place and establish closer relationships with developing countries, in response to the increasing cooperation between the US and its allies.

The opening ceremony featured the Russian Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu, as the first speaker. Shoigu accused the US-led NATO of intending to expand war from Ukraine to the Asia-Pacific region in multiple directions, which undermines the role of regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

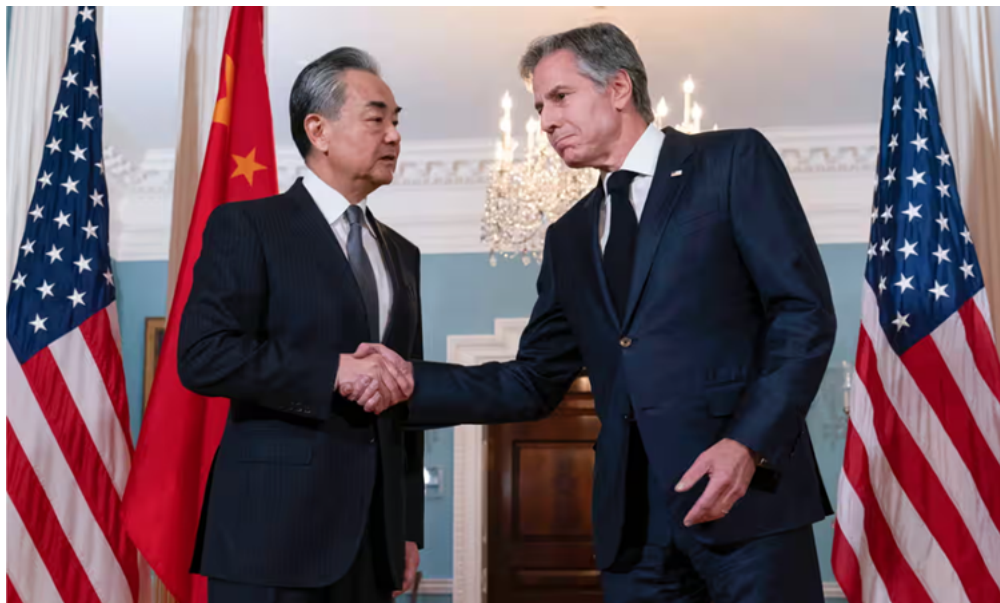
Shoigu further stated that the West's escalation of the conflict with Russia increases the likelihood of a direct conflict between nuclear powers. The term "escalation" refers primarily to military aid from the West to Ukraine.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the first speaker at the conference was the Russian Minister of Defence. This symbolic gesture from China sends a clear message that Russia had a central role in the conference.

Crisis and Diplomacy: Biden's Dual Approach to China in South China Sea Tensions

By Ondrej Pragr

US President Joe Biden is taking a firm stance in the South China Sea, reaffirming the United States' commitment to defending the Philippines in the event of aggression. Recent clashes between Filipino and Chinese vessels have escalated tensions in the disputed waters. President Biden, emphasising the "ironclad" defence commitment, invoked the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty binding the two nations. This marks a significant shift in approach, reflecting the Philippines' growing importance as a strategic ally, particularly under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who has reversed the pro-China policies of his predecessor.



📷 Wang Yi and Antony Blinken shake hands after their bilateral meeting at the state department in Washington. The ground is being prepared for a meeting between the US and Chinese presidents, Joe Biden and Xi Jinping, American officials have said. Photograph: José Luis Magaña/AP

Simultaneously, the US and China are making diplomatic strides to arrange a high-level meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping. The meeting could occur in November during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco, to which President Xi has been invited. The two nations are working on "high-level diplomacy" to mend their relations despite longstanding tensions over issues such as Taiwan and competition in the Asia-Pacific region. While the US is committed to responsible competition and cooperation on global challenges, both articles underscore the complex nature of the US-China relationship.

This dual approach by the United States – reaffirming its defence commitments in one region while pursuing diplomatic engagement with China in another – reflects the multifaceted challenges and opportunities it faces on the global stage.



Photo of the Chinese Newnew Polar Bear container ship. Source: *FleetMon*

Winter Is Coming: Attacks on Energy Facilities

By Karolina Baldrianova

As winter approaches, concerns arise that Russia will repeat last year's strategy of targeting energy infrastructure. President Zelenskyy recently reported an incident involving at least 11 drones that targeted the Khmelnytsky nuclear power plant in Western Ukraine. The drones were intercepted before reaching the plant, and its operations remained unaffected. However, the destruction of numerous windows at the site illustrates how close the attack was. Another assault this week, aiming at Donetsk's thermal power plant, resulted in significant equipment damage, causing electricity and water cut-offs for local inhabitants.

Last year, around 60 % of Ukraine's electricity generation capacity was severely damaged by Russia's actions. According to the Kyiv School of Economics, the estimated costs of direct energy infrastructure damage exceeded \$8.8 billion. Apart from economic consequences, attacks aimed at energy facilities critically endanger people's health and well-being. While Ukraine's capacity to defend against such attacks has improved, mainly due to international help in building more resilient air defence, the conditions remain discerning. Attacks on energy infrastructure must be considered with utmost importance, especially when damaging nuclear power plant may result in serious radiation leaks. Moreover, the power outages place millions of Ukrainians in danger, as access to electricity, heat, and water is crucial for survival during the winter times.

Balticconnector Puzzle: China or Russia?

By Karolina Badrianova

The story of Balticconnector continues with the Chinese Newnew Polar Bear container ship still standing as the primary suspect. Some recent revelations, however, have unveiled a possible motive, challenging the accident narrative. Before the incident, Polar Bear docked in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad for three days, and apparently, there has been crew switching. Moreover, the Chinese company's business is closely intertwined with Russian company Torgmoll, and the alleged owner, who lives in Moscow, has close ties with Russian officials as well. As the investigation continues, it remains challenging to make firm conclusions. Nevertheless, paying attention to these subtle details may eventually provide a more precise understanding, particularly in the context of energy and geopolitics.

Algeria to Supply Europe with Green Hydrogen

Last week, Algerian and German representatives met to discuss the future of hydrogen. Given Algeria's suitable location for renewable energy development, significant investments have been made, especially in solar power. The surplus electricity generated from renewable installations will be used for green hydrogen production, replacing natural gas and contributing to decarbonisation efforts. The recent German-Algerian encounter focused on negotiating the conversion and expansion of the existing gas infrastructure to bring hydrogen to European markets. Representatives from Spain and Italy have expressed a similar interest, further emphasising the region's commitment to enhance energy security and sustainability.

Resolutions for Conflicts in Sahel?

By Petra Nemcova

Talks between Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces

The ceasefire and humanitarian negotiations between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been reopened by the US, Saudi Arabia, and IGAD. IGAD is also participating on behalf of African Union. The objectives of the talks are to build a ceasefire, establish ceasefires, and provide humanitarian aid.

They will concentrate on the role of civilians in shaping Sudan's future rather than discussing more general political issues. The US demands a cooperative strategy, lifesaving measures, an end to hostilities, and a negotiated settlement.

Norway's Assistance in the Region of Sahel

An additional 3.3 million euros will be sent by Norway to help the Sahel region of West Africa, where a humanitarian crisis has been brought on by a series of coups. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN will coordinate the distribution of the aid, which is intended for Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. Rising rates of violence, insecurity, climate shocks, and political instability afflict the Sahel.



Norway will close its embassy in Mali. Source: Political Lore

37 million people in the region, according to UN estimates, require protection and humanitarian assistance. The increasing violence rates as well as jihadism, coups and other similar issues resulted in Norway closing its embassy in Bamako, which coordinated Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger as well as Chad.

Artificial Intelligence Safeguards in the US

By Petra Nemcova

An executive order issued by US President Joe Biden mandates that technology companies working on artificial intelligence (AI) will create consumer protection guidelines. It also mandates that businesses test new AI tools before releasing them and share information with the US government. The order also requires the Department of Commerce to develop standards for AI-generated materials, such as watermarks. There are some controversies however that AI will only benefit specific groups of people and therefore, the order mandates that any application of AI will be according to civil rights laws to avoid discrimination in employment, housing, healthcare, and sentencing.



Photo of US President Joe Biden signs an Executive Order about Artificial Intelligence and Vice President Kamala Harris. Source: REUTERS/Leah Millis

Moreover, Biden intends to urge US lawmakers to push for stronger data privacy protections, and the order is quite binding in that regard. He worries that artificial intelligence may produce fake photos, sounds, and videos that could damage people and disseminate misleading information.

The executive order to guarantee AI security issued by Biden is among the strongest sets of measures that have been taken by a government so far regarding this field.

Israel-Hamas War



Photo of the Israel-Hamas war. Source: PBS NewsHour

Israel Expands Its Military Operations in Gaza Amidst Regional Instability

By Stepanka Stastnikova

After days of delay, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) began to expand their air and ground operations in Gaza last week with the aim of destroying Hamas, marking a new phase of the conflict. Israeli troops have entered the northern part of the territory and established a presence there, advancing towards Gaza City. Contrary to the widely shared expectations of a full-blown assault, the IDF are taking a more staged approach and expand their activities only gradually, indicating a protracted war. The aim will presumably be to encircle Hamas in its system of underground tunnels and besiege it. As urban warfare is extremely destructive, this strategy will have enormous consequences for the civilians in Gaza who are already living under dire conditions.

Israel's retaliation, which has so far killed several thousand Palestinians, has sparked outrage, especially among Arab countries and non-state actors operating in the region, threatening to spill over into a wider conflict. The tensions remain high as Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militia from Lebanon, and groups from Syria have been firing missiles at Israel, which has responded by striking targets in the two countries. Meanwhile, the Houthis, another Iranian proxy, launched several missiles and drones from Yemen, with some of them accidentally hitting towns in Egypt. To support Israel as well as to deter Iran and its proxies from provoking an escalation, the US has bolstered its presence in the region.