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Western Countries and Ukrainian Conflict

[Dutch Safety Board issued a final report in the Malaysia flight MH17 crash case.](#) According to the Board, airplane was shot down with anti-air missile from Buk system. Safety board has presented 5 key findings. First one are shrapnel pieces found in the airplane wreck. [Their shape implicates Buk system missile.](#) Second proof is short audio recording from a black box which points to explosion outside the plane. Another finding proves that missile detonation killed probably just crew members. Safety board was unable to pinpoint exact position from where the missile was shot due to their limited access permit in the eastern Ukraine. Final finding blames Ukraine for the crash. According to the Board, Ukraine should have closed air space over this territory long time ago. Final report does not say which conflict side is responsible because this anti-air system could be in possession of both sides.

Fighting Against ISIS in Iraq and Syria

The idea of training Syrian rebels to face the so-called Islamic state has showed up as total disaster. The U.S. has so far invested to the programme which is supposed to train hundred to thousands of rebels, [more than 500 million USD.](#) However, only few tens were selected due to the lack of reliability and even these rebels handed over their Western equipment to al-Nusra, whereas others were attacked by al-Nusra. The U.S. has admitted now that only 4 to 5 rebels continue in the programme. Therefore, Washington is considering [cancelling the project.](#) Meanwhile, Russia has started backing

up Syrian regime by launching number of air strikes to all sorts of rebels, [inducing those supported by the U.S.](#) At late October meetings, Washington and Moscow thus signed [acknowledgement](#) to avoid any collisions during airstrikes against ISIS targets. Moreover, [Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi faced significant pressure of his government](#) to ask Moscow for help in the airstrikes. As Iraq is on Western side in ISIS fight though, the U.S. has immediately called to al-Abadi in order to ensure that he is not going to turn to Russia in this matter.



Source: [CNN](#)

Newly elected Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced American president Obama that Canada will [withdraw its six fighter jets](#) from air strikes and leave only seventy Special Forces to train Kurdish armed forces. White House vice versa announced sending [fifty special forces units](#) to Syria for advising purposes only. After recent rescue mission when American soldiers altogether with Kurdish forces freed several hostages under ISIS holding, experts are questioning [whether the U.S. has not already started 'boots on the ground' operation.](#)

Aside of battlefield, number of international and bilateral meetings occurred. The U.S., Russia, Iran and other significant actors [met in Vienna](#) to create a peace agreement about Syria, however, without dealing with Syrian president Assad solution. [France then hosted](#) the U.S., Jordan and Turkey in Paris to accept resolution

trying to stop Assad from using barrel bombs against his citizens.

North America



Source: [New York Times](#)

At the beginning of October, the U.S. started [withdrawing its Patriot air-defence systems](#) from Turkey which were deployed there as a response to Turkey's call to NATO allies for help in defence against Syrian missiles. This unwelcomed step comes as Turkey claims that Syrian ground air-defence systems bothered Turkish aircraft during patrolling and Russian fast jets had entered the Turkish national airspace twice. Besides the U.S., Germany and the Netherlands have also ended missions of their Patriot systems.

An important decision came from the White House as U.S. president Barack Obama announced his commitment [to remain U.S. troops in Afghanistan](#) even.

after 2016 when originally there should have been only a small contingent of 1,000 troops at the U.S. Embassy. Newly, there will be 5,500 soldiers at the end of Obama's presidency in 2017 in comparison with current 9,800 troops. This decision is a result of month-long review into the future role of the U.S. in Afghanistan which concluded that Afghan armed forces have not been strong enough yet as they need to be. Another factor might also be current Taliban offensive and a consequent growing number of both military and civilian casualties.

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This step was welcomed by [Afghan representatives](#) who cooperated on the review, and also by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg who [considers the decision](#) being a continuous effort by allies in securing Afghanistan.

In the context of U.S. defence, president Obama vetoed a bill of the *National Defense Authorization Act* which current version allows Congress not to fulfil planned budget cuts (so called sequestration) through resources for overseas contingencies and war expenses. According to Obama, this would, however, apply only to defence, not to national security issues which limits would still stay in place. The bill that introduces defence and security budget at the amount of \$612 million, also limits Obama's intention to close the prison at Guantanamo until the end of his presidency which has been his political goal for years. The bill returns back to the Congress which has to have three-fifths of votes in both chambers to overcome the veto.

In the meantime, the world witnessed general elections in Canada which results might have consequences for current Canadian defence policy. The winning party has become the Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau who already during their political campaign stated that he would end Canada's participation in airstrike campaign against the Islamic State. After the elections, Trudeau announced this intention to U.S. president Obama, with no precious date though. On the other hand, Trudeau does not end country's contribution to the fight against ISIS completely as he promised to deploy more troops to deliver training to Iraqi armed forces. Unlike his predecessor, he is also willing to take about 25,000 Syrian refugees. Another Trudeau's intention is to withdraw Canada from the Joint Strike Fighter programme which should deliver new fast jets F-35 Lightning II

as a replacement for aging CF-18 Hornet fleet. In his view, the primarily task for Canadian Air Force is to defend North America, not use stealth aircraft in ground attack missions. According to Trudeau, the programme also become too much expensive and finding more suitable and affordable platform, Canada would be able to invest more into Canadian Navy and its capabilities.



Source: [Wikimedia](#)

British Isles

About 100 British troops will be deployed to Baltic states symbolizing higher effort to deter possible Russian aggression against these countries as was seen in Ukraine. According to British Secretary of state for defence Michael Fallon, soldiers will join allied troops in the area and participate in local exercises. As he previously noted, this deployment represents persistent rather than permanent presence which Baltic states and Poland have been calling for. In the context of Eastern Europe, British troops are also deployed to Ukraine to train local armed forces and the UK several times provided air policing in the Baltics. Besides engagement in Europe, the UK decided to maintain about 450 soldiers in Afghanistan even in 2016 and continue in providing training to Afghan armed forces. As Fallon said, it was recognised it would take time for

Afghans to develop full operational capabilities to provide complete security to the country.

Another British military presence - fighting against the ISIS in Iraq - evoked a dispute with Russia over alleged 'green light' for British fast jets to shoot down Russian aircraft in case of emergency. For this purpose, British Tornado jets should have been armed with air-to-air AIM-132 missiles. Russia has already summoned British defence attaché in Moscow to explain the whole situation. British Ministry of defence, however, refused these allegations as well as the Foreign Office.

In the meantime, the UK prepares for adopting final decisions on its future nuclear deterrence as formulation of a new strategic review has been undertaken. According to permanent undersecretary at the MoD Jon Thompson, nuclear submarines will be the greatest financial risk in the equipment plan as the programme includes not only the successor submarines to the Vanguard-class carrying Trident D5 missiles, but also Astute-class hunt submarines. According to Thompson who called this project „a monster“, the annual costs will be about £5 billion and including the infrastructure and future support, the whole programme should cost up to £40 billion in next 10 years.



Source: [Wikimedia](#)

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Last but not the least, the UK presented a new counter-extremism strategy which should systematically confront both violent and non-violent extremism. The main objectives are a new power for the home secretary to ban extremist groups, powers for law enforcement and local authorities to stop individuals engaging in extremist behaviour or to close down premises used to support extremism. The strategy also further focuses on media as there should be tough measures against channels that broadcast extremist content and demands on internet service providers to do more in removing extremist material and identifying their authors. Besides these premises, Prime Minister David Cameron also announced a review of public institutions to ensure they are protected from infiltration by extremists.

Continental Europe

Baltic States continue in strengthening their defences. [Latvian ministry of defence announced](#) acquisition of another short range anti-air RBS-70 systems. For 3.6 million euro Latvia will get new missiles, training services and support from Saab. There are also speculations that the deal will also include more launchers. Estonia plans to increase its defence spending by 9%. [About 449 million euro defence budget should exceed the 2% level set by NATO](#). More than one quarter of expenses will be spent on Estonian armed forces development and modernization. Country is planning to buy CV90 armoured vehicles and develop cyber warfare capabilities. Besides Baltic states, [Norway will also increase its budget](#). Oslo is planning to buy expensive F-35 fifth generation fighters and strengthen its position in the North.

[New elections in Poland will have implications for country's defence and foreign policy](#). The Law and Justice Party's win by 37.6% allows it to form government without need to establish coalition. This party is known for its euro-realist stand. According to analysts, new government will probably not support broadening the EU integration, nor Poland getting to the eurozone. On the other hand, it is expected that the new government will strengthen its relations with the United States. The Law and Justice election promise was to increase defence budget to at least 2.5% of GDP and to continue with army modernization. [Polish Ministry of Defence announced](#) support for general Pacek's proposal to establish Polish national guard with estimated 300,000 volunteers. In peace time, they should help with natural and industrial disasters and if conflict comes, they will be deployed as auxiliary units to conventional armed forces. [Poland also arranged the biggest military exercise since its armed forces professionalization](#). About 7,000 regulars and reservists with more than 700 heavy equipment exercised mobilization capability and homeland defence in Dragon-15 military exercise. Armed forces from the U.S, UK, Canada and Germany participated as well with 900 personnel and heavy machinery. [Germany has temporarily suspended its Eurofighter Typhoon delivery](#) due to discovery of technical problems with vertical stabilizers. Eurofighter consortium confirmed a manufacturing quality problem and added that problems does not affect flight safety. Defects were found on BAE Systems-made parts. The company is also involved in quality problem with Typhoon fuselage from last year.



Source: [Wikimedia](#)

[European leaders approved financial help to Turkey](#) as more than 700,000 immigrants came to Europe from Turkey refugee camps. Country will get 3 billion euro and EU will fasten visa-free program and reopen EU invitation talks as well. EU leaders have also [boosted Frontex agency power](#) in order to more coordinated deportations of non-accepted migrants. The UN and the EU decided to [increase refugee camps capacity](#) along the Balkan way from Greece to Germany. EU support will help increase capacity by 100,000 places and UNHCR will provide support for another 20,000 refugees. The closure of Hungarian-Croatian border shifts immigrant influx to Slovenia. Country is now under enormous pressure and announced that is [capable to take just 2,500 immigrants per day](#). Desperate [Slovenia also called for international help](#) as it had to deploy its own armed forces to help controlling borders and immigrant influx. Austria which previously criticized Hungarian border fence, is now [considering building fence](#) on Austrian-Slovenian border. According to Austrian chancellor, the fence should be different but he does not add in which way. In the meantime, Germany is still pushing for [approval of its plan to move refugees](#) from the Middle East directly to Europe. The aim is to ease pressure on transit countries and refugee camps on the way.



Source: [ITV](#)

Luxemburg hosted EU foreign ministers summit. [The main topic](#) was to unite EU countries towards Russian intervention in Syria and towards role of Syrian president. There are different stands in Assad case. France is currently investigating him for war crimes while Germany wants him to participate in the post-conflict process. Another topic was [possible lifting of Belarusian sanctions](#) as new elections confirms Belarusian leader in power by majority. The point is to lift sanctions in order to lean Belarus more to the EU.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The so-called [Trident Juncture exercise 2015](#) officially started in Spain, Portugal and Italy at the end of October including 36,000 units from 28 states. More than 160 aircraft altogether with 60 warships, 70 ships and thousands of vehicles have participated at the event which lasts till the beginning of November. The exercise simulates a fictive conflict of water in Africa plus preparation to potential Russian aggression. Very High Readiness Joint Task Force was also tested to the ability of quick reaction. Besides countries, governmental, non-governmental and international organisations and the international advisers were presented as well, including Russian teams in accordance with Vienna protocols 2011.



Source: [Panorama.it](#)

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