

CROSSROADS

At the Intersection of Geopolitics and Geoeconomics

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Important issues to watch around the globe:

United States – North Korea summit

Arguably the most important geopolitical news of this month is the possibility of a summit between the US and North Korea. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has announced that he will [no longer test nuclear](#) and intercontinental ballistic missiles. Importantly, the regime has not agreed to abandon its nuclear programs; President Trump intends to tell the North Korean leader that he must take steps to get rid of the program for sanctions to be lifted. Kim has made improving the economy one of his priorities, and sanctions and virtually no access to the international economy have taken their toll. Nevertheless, Kim is unlikely to dismantle his nuclear weapons program entirely. The outcome of this summit will also depend [on regional players](#). Kim meets with South Korean President Moon this Thursday to negotiate an official end to the Korean War. Both the negotiations with South Korea and a meeting with the US President give North Korea some legitimacy. If the outcome of the negotiations depends entirely on denuclearization, then success is unlikely. However, if the negotiations can serve as a step towards a realistic and long-term solution to the US-North Korean relationship, then there could be hope. We must also carefully watch China's position and involvement in this summit.

Europe's far-right revitalized after elections in Hungary

Elections in Hungary this month illustrated that populism and far-right policies continue to gain support in Central Europe. Viktor Orban, leader of the Fidesz party, won a landslide victory. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [criticized the election campaign](#), citing media bias and intimidation. The election presents another challenge to an increasingly globalized economy and immigration. Orban has

spoken harshly about immigrants and attempted to restrict the number of refugees and asylum seekers coming into Hungary. The rise in nationalist leadership on the continent poses yet another challenge to the EU. Are we about to witness a rising of populism in Latin America besides Europe and the US?

Sargsyan's Resignation in Armenia

The Armenian Parliament voted on April 17 to allow former President Serzh Sargsyan, who had been President since 2008, to become Prime Minister. A revised constitution, approved in 2015, gives the Armenian Prime Minister most power and made the Presidency a ceremonial position. Protestors marched through Yerevan almost immediately, and after 11 days of protesting [Sargsyan resigned](#). Sargsyan's resignation presents a challenge to authoritarian leaders like Vladimir Putin and Turkish leader Tayyip Erdogan, who have made similar amendments to their constitutions to stay in power.

Abdo Benitez claims victory in Paraguay

Abdo Benitez, son of former dictator Alfredo Stroessner's private secretary, defeated a center-left coalition to keep the Colorado party in power. Benitez supports low-tax policies and hopes to secure continued foreign investment in agricultural production, exemplifying a trend in South American politics. Paraguay is the fourth biggest [soybean exporter](#) in the world and a major beef supplier. Benitez will have to fight calls to levy a 10% tax on soybean exports, which, given the current international debates over agricultural tariffs, will be important to monitor. Opposition members hope Benitez will make a genuine commitment to combat government corruption.

What's happening in Syria?

The US, France, and the UK launched joint airstrikes in response to a suspected chemical attack by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on the town of Douma. The airstrikes targeted a scientific research facility in Damascus potentially connected to the production of chemical and biological weapons, a chemical weapons storage facility, and a chemical weapons equipment storage site. The response was greater than any other during the Syrian Civil War and came shortly after the US President said that he wanted an immediate [withdrawal of troops](#) from Syria. President Trump has made it clear that if the Assad regime turns to chemical weapons again, strikes will continue. In a joint statement with French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday, President Trump offered an [unclear answer](#) on whether the US would be withdrawing from Syria, stating concerns about Iran's access to the Mediterranean. Though airstrikes sent a signal to Assad, it does not look as though there is a clear end in sight to the conflict in Syria and if anything, it remains a potential arena for a more intense, regional conflict.

The Iran Nuclear Deal

The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act stipulates that every 90 days, the President must certify that Iran is abiding by the terms of the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#). The President has twice refused to certify the deal but has yet to reimpose sanctions. However, the President made it clear in January that the US would withdraw from the deal in May if the ["disastrous flaws"](#) of the deal were not fixed. Trump is concerned that Iran's missile program is still underway and that the restrictions on Iran's uranium levels expire within 10-15 years. One potential outcome of any renegotiation of the agreement could be the extension of these sunset clauses restricting uranium enrichment. French President Macron said on Tuesday that he was willing to work on a new deal—a significant break from the past. Oil prices hit \$75 a barrel due to fears that renewed sanctions would restrict global oil supplies. Several questions remain, however, over whether the US can unilaterally withdraw from the agreement, or

whether European partners would comply with US sanctions.

Turkish snap elections amid economic downturn and political instability while relations with Greece deteriorate

Last Wednesday, Turkish President Erdogan called [snap elections](#) for June, moving the elections forward by almost 17 months. Despite the terminology, these elections come as little surprise, given that the Turkish economy dived to record lows in April, with calls for multi-billion dollar [debt-restructuring](#). Moving the elections forward will mean that Erdogan has to push through elections laws regarding the presidential candidacy introduced by last year's [constitutional referendum](#), which changed Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system. Despite these challenges, Erdogan maintains tight control over the media and is able to effectively block any realistic opposition, making the prospect of him losing power relatively low. In the meantime, the Aegean has become a hot spot with almost daily disputes between Greece and Turkey (both NATO members). Some fear that a fight may erupt which will have significant consequences.

Important reads:

[Adapting to American Decline](#)

Christopher A. Preble

[Brazil's Corruption Fallout](#)

Claire Felter and Racio Cara Labrador

['Us vs. Them' Review: The Haves and Have-Nots](#)

Howard V. French