

A WORLD IN MOTION



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In this special edition:

LOOKING BACK at 5 key events and trends
& over the past six months

LOOKING FORWARD at key situations to
watch (and pray for)



THE NUMBERS:

2017 THUS FAR



500,000

The approximate number of Syrian refugees who have returned home in 2017 so far



2 billion

The number of Facebook users since 27 June



37

The number of elections held in 2017 so far



500+

The number of 'terror incidents' around the world between January and June

WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS?

The past six months have seen significant geopolitical moves by China, the US, Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Qatar became an 'outcast' in the region, China continued to militarise the South China Seas, and the new US administration under President Donald Trump made significant decisions that will have ripple effects.



The **Islamic State** (IS) ramped up attacks in Europe and 'branched out' to the **Philippines**, while losing strategic territory in their self-proclaimed caliphate as coalition forces battled to take back control of key cities where IS was 'founded'. In **Egypt**, the group claimed responsibility for two church bombings on Palm Sunday that killed 47 people. In Europe, IS seemed to shift its focus from France (which saw four attacks in 2016) to **Britain**, where there were three separate attacks in the first six months of the year (Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena and London Bridge).

A referendum in **Turkey** saw President Erdogan consolidating his power, and led to widespread arrests of those linked to the 2016 coup that had sought to remove him from power.



Elections in **Europe** strengthened the bond between the countries, despite post-Brexit predictions that the bloc would fall apart. Electoral victory for 'conservatives' in the Netherlands and in France defied the notion that the European Union's days are numbered. France and Germany, in particular, are strengthening relationship to will ensure strong leadership for the future.

The **North Korean** regime of Kim Jong-Un kept their status as part of the "Axis of Evil" – it fired 10 missiles towards Japan (all of which fell short), and claimed to have cracked the conundrum of how to place a nuclear warhead on a ballistic missile. The return of an American prisoner – who was in a coma and died soon after being returned to the US – may heighten tensions in the already-volatile relationship between the US and North Korea.



In the **United States**, President Donald Trump continued sending controversial tweets. The Russian hacking scandal and the supposed Trump-Putin links are raising more questions in Washington, but tensions are growing with Russia after a US fighter jet downed a Syrian pilot and surveillance drone, and Russian president Vladimir Putin vowed to consider US fighter jets in Syrian airspace as legitimate targets.

This special edition will look at five key news stories that had dramatic ripple effects in the first half of 2017. We aim to highlight how much the world is constantly changing, and how Christians need to adjust their perspectives and engagement accordingly.



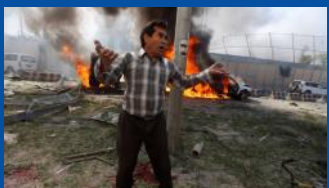


Qatari Foreign

Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said Qatar will do "whatever it takes to protect our people", as he accused Gulf states that have imposed a blockade on Doha of trying to undermine his nation's sovereignty. "We welcome any serious efforts to resolve our differences with our neighbours," he said. He accused Saudi Arabia and its regional allies of "demanding that we must surrender our sovereignty as the price for ending the siege".



A Chinese road building project in the Himalayas has become the centre of an escalating border dispute between India and China, with both sides accusing the other of territorial intrusions. Described by the Indian government as a "significant change of status quo with serious security implications for India," the controversial road runs through the disputed Doklam Plateau, on the unmarked border between China and Bhutan. Though not a part of Indian territory, the plateau holds immense strategic importance for Delhi and is vital to its geopolitical interests.



In Afghanistan, Ramadan this year (May 27 to June 25), was the deadliest month in the past 15 years with terrorist attacks in multiple locations, which claimed more than 230 lives and wounded over 800 others.

1. ISLAMIC STATE



Over the past few months, the Islamic State (IS) has experienced significant loss of territory in both Iraq and Syria. On 24 June, the Syrian Democratic Forces completely besieged the city of Raqqa, trapping about 4,000 IS militants. In Iraq, coalition forces won back significant territory in Mosul, the city where the group first proclaimed a 'caliphate' three years ago. In what is considered a symbolic act of defeat, IS fighters blew up the historic mosque where their leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, had called Muslims around the world to join his vision of the caliphate.

So is IS defeated, and do we need to worry any longer? IS grew rapidly during its first few months of existence and was able to establish 'governing' partnerships with other militant groups, such as Boko Haram in West Africa (primarily Nigeria) and Al-Shabaab in East Africa (primarily Somalia). Recently, jihadist groups affiliated with IS began fighting the Philippine government in the city of Marawi. With these connections that reach beyond Iraq and Syria, the IS 'presence' may linger for a while longer.

2. TURKEY REFERENDUM

On 16 April, Turkey held a constitutional referendum on whether to approve 18 proposed amendments to the Turkish constitution. The amendments included changing the number of seats in parliament and allowing the president, currently Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to become both head of state and government with the power to appoint and sack ministers and the vice president. It was a closely contested vote, where those in favour of the changes outweighed those against by 51%-49%. For at least half of the Turkish population, Mr Erdoğan's consolidation of power is seen as positive, especially in terms of Turkish nationalism and identity. With the wars in Syria and Iraq, raging on Turkey's borders to the south and west, and internal instability in the form of a growing Kurdish nationalism, strong leadership is viewed as vital in challenging times. However, to a sizeable proportion of the population opposed to the changes, there remains a deep sense of uncertainty in the current course of Mr Erdoğan.

To Turkey's European Union (EU) neighbours and NATO allies, the move further away from a 'traditional' democracy towards a more autocratic system is alarming and not likely to improve

Three attacks in Britain in the first half of 2017 (Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena and London Bridge) were all claimed by IS, though there is little evidence that the attackers had any direct contact with or instruction from IS leaders in the Middle East. As the group loses territory, these claims of attacks in the West could be evidence of a growing desperation.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Even if the Islamic State is 'defeated', or at least ousted from Iraq and Syria, the group would not be destroyed entirely. That goes for any Islamic terror organisation – for Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the Muslim Brotherhood, defeats are temporary and never mean that the groups are 'gone entirely'. As long as there are extremist interpretations of Islamic holy writings, Islamic extremism will exist. And while the Quran does indeed promote Islam as a "religion of peace", it also encourages the invasion of non-Muslim countries.

However, there is reason for hope. Dr Daniel Shayesteh (an Iranian Christian who converted from Islam) says that that past six months have made it clear that "terrorism can be minimised substantially if leadership in the West is able to put pressure on Islamic countries to stop financing terrorism." Meanwhile, the Church in Iraq and Syria (which was almost destroyed by IS), is facing a new season after years of devastation. As refugees start returning home, there are new opportunities for Christians to play a key role in rebuilding and reconciliation. This is also a critical opportunity for the global Church: to support Iraqi and Syrian Christians in the possible 'Christianisation' of the region. While the war in Syria is likely to continue longer than the war in Iraq, the pending 'defeat' of IS is still a symbolic victory that will fill Syrians' hearts with hope once again.



Turkey's chances of joining the EU any time soon. But Turkey remains a crucial and strategic (albeit complicated) NATO ally. Turkey's large military (NATO's second largest) and its geopolitical position bridging the Middle East and Europe, bordering both the Mediterranean and the Black Seas, make it indispensable for NATO. But also because of its location, Turkey needs NATO just as much, given its proximity to Russia in the north and the turmoil of Middle Eastern conflicts to the south.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Turkey carries a deep spiritual legacy stretching back to the time of the apostle Paul, who travelled repeatedly through the region. The first seven

NEWS HEADLINES



Beijing has called the presence of a US warship near a disputed island in the **South China Sea** "a serious political and military provocation". China responded by sending military vessels and fighter jets to the island. It happened hours before US President Donald Trump and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping spoke on the phone. During the call, Mr Xi told Mr Trump that "negative factors" were affecting US-China relations, according to Chinese state TV. A White House statement said the leaders had instead "reaffirmed their commitment to a denuclearised Korean peninsula".



Germany has paid millions of euros for the so-called Panama Papers revealing offshore tax evasion, reports say. The Federal Crime Office (BKA) said it would put the multi-million-file inventory into electronic form to allow for detailed evaluation. The documents leaked last year exposed rich and powerful people, who had used tax havens to hide their wealth.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Israel on a historic three-day visit – the first by an Indian prime minister. The visit coincides with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1992.

Ecumenical Councils of the early Church met within the same area. The seven churches listed in Revelation 2-3 can all be traced to the geographical location of Turkey, but many of those spiritual seeds have lain dormant for centuries. Of Turkey's 75 million people, only 163,000 profess to be Christian.

But, despite their low numbers, they are reaching out with the Gospel and demonstrating Christ's love in tangible ways, ministering to the needs of many Syrian refugees who are living in limbo –

3. EU ELECTIONS

When the majority of the British population voted to leave the European Union (EU) in the surprise 2016 Brexit vote, analysts and media pointed to the related wave of populism (a focus on the concerns of the 'ordinary' citizens) that was growing across the EU. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders was leading an anti-Muslim, anti-migrant, anti-EU movement that was set to upset decades of liberal politics. In France, far-right leader Marine Le Pen praised Britain's example and called for France to do the same.

When Dutch and French voters went to the polls in the first half of 2017, however, it became clear that these nationalist, populist movements were not strong enough to take the lead and cause an upset. Mark Rutte, a centre-right candidate, won the majority vote in the Netherlands, while centrist Emmanuel Macron assumed leadership in France. And while nationalist populism has not gone away (analysts suggest that the recent growth may still point to 'trouble' for the EU in future elections), fears of a complete breaking apart were not realised, and the bloc is safe for now. Since the elections, France and Germany in particular (both leading nations in the EU) have been working on drawing the two countries closer together and increasing their cooperation.

One key reason for Brexit was a desire to stop the flow of refugees from the EU to Britain, which was stipulated by a 'quota system' implemented by the EU. This was also a motivating factor for EU citizens who voted for Wilders and Le Pen. Since late 2015, the EU has been inundated by vast numbers of refugees seeking asylum, and EU member states were told by the leadership that they had to share the responsibility.

4. NORTH KOREAN MISSILE CRISIS

2017 has been a year of rapid progress for North Korea's missile programme. The country has fired 17 missiles during 11 tests since February, improving its technology with each launch. On 4 July, the regime claimed that it had conducted its first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), and that the test had been a success. Pyongyang could now potentially hit the US mainland (Alaska could be in range of the tested ICBM). North Korea's latest launch came on the eve of the US's Independence Day holiday, and just days before leaders of the US, China, Japan and South Korea (at the G20 summit in Hamburg,

unable to reach Europe and not yet able to return home. Turks, too, are coming to know Christ through satellite television stations like Sat-7, and through various online ministries. However, as relations with the West appear to be cooling, and Mr Erdoğan's staunch Islamist leanings begin to be felt (numerous Syriac churches, monasteries and other Christian properties are being seized by his government), it would appear that the spiritual climate is 'heating up'. In nature, some dormant seeds require fire to germinate and bear fruit – this too may be true for the Church in Turkey, in this season.



FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The EU allows free movement of goods and people between the 28 member states, which has strengthened the various member states, as well as bringing challenges.

The bolstering of the EU by the recent electoral results is likely to impact the Church in a positive way: by allowing free movement of different nationalities (including refugees who have been granted asylum), the Church will be challenged to maintain an outward-looking and open attitude that embraces and welcomes different cultures. In a nationalist, populist culture, the Church could become more insular and concerned with its own interests.

A less nationalist EU is also very good for the more-than-a-million refugees who have sought safety and a future within the bloc. As INcontext has reported before, this has enabled the European Church to engage with Muslims on their doorstep instead of having to travel to the Middle East. This new focus for the Church has not always been smooth sailing, but it has breathed new life into many EU churches that had stagnated. Were the EU to fall apart and nations to look to their own interests, both the refugees and the Church would suffer.



Germany on 7 and 8 July) are expected to discuss efforts to rein in North Korea's nuclear and missile tests.

There is a general consensus that the latest was Pyongyang's most successful missile test since its ballistic missile programme gathered pace in the late 1990s. International condemnation from key world

NEWS HEADLINES



US President Donald Trump will meet with Russian

President Vladimir Putin at a summit in Germany (7-8 July) that brings two world leaders whose political fortunes have become intertwined face-to-face for the first time. Both the Kremlin and the White House announced that the pair will meet on the sidelines of the summit of G20 nations in Hamburg. Trump's national security adviser H.R. McMaster downplayed the significance of the meeting, one of nine such side meetings for the US president over two days. Russia and the United States are at odds over Ukraine, NATO expansion and the civil war in Syria where Moscow supports President Bashar al-Assad.



Two billion people — more than a quarter of the world's population — hang out on **Facebook** at least once a month. The milestone that Mark Zuckerberg announced is remarkable because no other Internet company has ever reached it. If Facebook were a country, it would be the most populous.



Russian strategic bombers destroyed three ammunition depots and a command post of Islamic State in the Syrian province of Hama, using advanced airborne cruise missiles, Russian agencies reported on Wednesday, citing Russia's Defence Ministry.

leaders was swift, but none appeared to present a new solution to North Korea's military ambitions. North Korea maintains that since it is faced with what they term "US provocations" (approximately 28,000 US troops based in South Korea and annual, large-scale military drills), it has as much right as any other state to develop a nuclear deterrent. Added to this, their leader Kim Jong-un is keenly aware of the fate of other dictators who lacked nuclear weapons (Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein being key examples).

The biggest question remains: what can the US and the international community do to stop Kim Jong-un acquiring a nuclear arsenal with ICBMs? A realistic answer to this question has evaded diplomats, nuclear experts and world leaders for years. Since US President Donald Trump came to office, there has been some tough talk from Washington, including the possibility of a military strike, but this remains a highly risky option since South Korea and Japan (the US's strategic regional allies) could suffer huge casualties in a retaliatory strike.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Mr Trump has struggled to formulate a coherent policy towards North Korea, except to say that he has dispensed with the sanctions and isolation — known as "strategic patience" — pursued under

5. DONALD TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY

Both derided and applauded, US president Donald Trump is one of the most controversial leaders in the nation's history. When the political outsider caused shockwaves with his November 2016 win, controversy was expected, and the first six months of this year have seen plenty of that. Mr Trump has been criticised for initiating a "refugee ban", abandoning the Paris Climate Agreement, pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Trading Partnership, and instigating division in the Middle East (the current Qatar crisis has been attributed to his supposed 'meddling' during his trip to Saudi Arabia).

He has, however, also been praised for taking a stand and for "sticking to his guns" even when making highly criticised decisions. Christians in particular have been supportive of some of his moves, including the recent decision to not host a Ramadan dinner at the White House in celebration of the end of the Muslim holy month. He has also been praised for stopping funding for 'sanctuary cities' that had become a safe haven for criminals.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Leaders are appointed for seasons, and Mr Trump has become president at a time when the world is undergoing significant geopolitical changes (such as Britain leaving the EU, Russia taking a leading role in Middle East conflicts, and China transforming global trading and economics).

For the Church, Mr Trump's leadership has both positive and negative repercussions. The US is still

former president Barack Obama. North Korea's greatest ally, China, has failed to convince their economically-dependent neighbour to abandon their missile programme. Likewise, Russia (North Korea's other near-neighbour and former close ally) has also failed to facilitate a lasting solution to the deepening crisis. Three major powers in the region, with the backing of crippling international sanctions, have been unable to solve the ongoing crisis.

International recognition as a nuclear power and the possibility of bilateral engagement with the US have long been ambitions of the small-but-powerful nation of North Korea. During his presidential election campaign, Mr Trump stated that he would be prepared to receive Kim Jong-un in Washington. Though many, across the political spectrum, balked at the notion, North Korea's state media praised him as "a very wise politician".

Perhaps Mr Trump is a leader who has the courage to act in the opposite spirit to that which the world expects. Rather than attempting to obliterate the North Koreans by means of a military strike (which could result in huge casualties and another disastrous war), perhaps he could offer an olive branch instead, not necessarily condoning their actions, but acknowledging their fears as legitimate and being prepared to engage with them on a level playing-field. It would be a tremendously bold, unexpected and risky action, but one that has never been tried before and could very well diffuse a deeply troubling and volatile situation.



the primary 'mission force' in the world today (sending the most people and finances to the unreached world), and Mr Trump's intention to "put America first" could harm missionary endeavours around the globe. On the other hand, Mr Trump's decision to cut government funding for abortion facilities in the US has received much praise from Christians, as did the relatively strong tone (compared to Barack Obama) that he took in Saudi Arabia when addressing issues of Islamic extremism. Others have also praised his military actions in the Middle East (such as deploying the "Mother of All Bombs" in Afghanistan and approving a military strike in Syria), saying that a stronger US presence in conflict zones gives minority Christians a better chance of survival there.

As *INcontext* has said before, Donald Trump is by no means a Christian 'hero' or role-model. Many of his actions, attitudes and statements are opposite in nature to the Christian model found in Jesus Christ. That, however, does not take away from the fact that God will use Mr Trump for His purposes and 'big picture plan'. As more than one Christian leader in the US stated, Mr Trump may be the "wrecking ball" God intends to use to bring about necessary changes in the increasingly liberal nation.

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

INcontext Website:

www.incontextinternational.org
Please visit our website for up-to-date information on events around the world.

If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.



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LOOKING FORWARD: WHAT TO WATCH (AND PRAY FOR)

The coalition fight against the **Islamic State** may have had a slow start, but from what we can see in Iraq and Syria at least, the 'ruling' days of the caliphate may be over. As the coalition forces make further gains in the coming months, there may be a further rise in attacks in Europe and the wider West. The Islamic State is by no means completely defeated, and the group is likely to go down fighting,



As INcontext has said many times before, the refugee crisis that has been going on for more than five years has afforded the **European Church** one of the greatest mission opportunities in decades. As more and more of **Iraq** is liberated, many of those refugees may start returning. This, however, is not the case with **Syria** – analysts suggest that the situation there will become a lot worse before it gets better. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been warned that if he uses chemical weapons, the US will respond with force, and if this happens, it would probably escalate the fighting. Previously unharmed areas of Western Syria could face the same destruction as Aleppo.

In **South Sudan**, the refugee crisis also continues to escalate. In 2011, it was hoped that the new independence of South Sudan would allow for a time of peace in which Christians could be trained and sent back to the Muslim north. But not even a year passed before the majority-Christian country was caught up in a civil war with the president and his deputy battling for power. There are now more than one million South Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda, and the numbers are growing daily.



In the ongoing **Qatari** crisis, the controversial 'list of demands' made by surrounding Arab nations is being considered, including the closing down of Al Jazeera, the most influential media voice in the region.



China's 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR) economic initiative continues to move forward, with freight trains already being sent back-and-forth between China and Britain. With 65 nations directly impacted by OBOR, the Church in China has recognised the economic expansion as an open door to reach the Muslim world. However, with China expanding its influence in the South China Sea and aggravating the surrounding countries, Chinese missionaries could eventually face closed doors in South East Asian countries that oppose Chinese militarisation of the disputed islands.

Our world as we know it continues to change drastically, and as believers what is our reaction to this changing new reality? Father Luke Veronis (of Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, Boston) in a recent sermon to his congregation, summed it up: "Yes, we have what seems to be a new reality in our society and world. Radicalism. Extremism. Terrorism. Homegrown brokenness. And Violence. The new dark reality will tempt us to fear and to hate. Yet Jesus Christ calls us to something much greater and much harder. He calls us to dwell in His peace. Let no fear become greater than His peace which dwells within us. And from this place of peace, let us love the other, including our enemy."

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION



PROJECT RESTORATION

Providing trauma counselling and trauma counselling training for South Sudanese refugees

"The first challenge we face here as pastors is how to counsel the traumatised people while we are also traumatised, so we need special training as leaders on counselling."

According to the United Nations, there are currently more than 1.8 million South Sudanese refugees, and more than 890,000 of them are living in Uganda. Most of these refugees live in camps in the north of the country, close to the South Sudan border.

In response to pastors' requests, INcontext has launched Project Restoration. 30 pastors from various refugee camps have been invited to attend a 5-day training course at a centralised location close to the refugee camps. First, they will receive counselling for their own trauma, and thereafter, they will be trained to do trauma counselling with their congregation members.

To support this project, please make use of the INcontext bank details and use 'Rest' together with your email address (as much as possible of it) as reference.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact our project department (gustav@incontextministries.org) or [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the website.