

Asma Noray: For War News Radio at Swarthmore College, I'm Asma Noray.

Dylan Okabe-Jawdat: And I'm Dylan Okabe-Jawdat. Pro-Russian demonstrators in Ukraine seized government buildings in several cities near the Russian border, including Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk. Similar tactics were used by protesters in February to oust former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. These activists, some of whom have declared a new independent state, the Donetsk People's Republic, argue that the high concentration of ethnic Russians in Eastern Ukraine justifies independence. Although Russia has yet to recognize this new state, United States Secretary of State John Kerry said that civil unrest between the new Ukrainian government and these protestors could, quote, "potentially be a contrived pretext for military intervention." Kerry also suggested that Russian special forces and agents were responsible for instigating these demonstrations, and the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have warned Russia against any further intervention in Ukraine.

Noray: Iran celebrated a National Day of Nuclear Technology this week, marking its eighth year since first enriching uranium. At a celebration, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei explained that, quote "None of the country's nuclear achievements can be stopped, and no one has the right to bargain over it," referring to the "p-five plus one" talks in Vienna featuring the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany. Though Iran has already curbed its nuclear program in return for eased sanctions, the current dialogue, which is supported by Khamenei, seeks to further constrain its nuclear program. Iran insists that its nuclear program is peaceful, and according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is continuing to cooperate with a United Nations investigation of its nuclear sites. In late 2013, the "p-five plus one" countries formed a framework deal under which Iran agreed to greater transparency, and would address suspicions that it may have designed an atomic weapon.

Okabe-Jawdat: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered his ministers to halt negotiations with Palestinian representatives as United States-led peace talks between the two sides continue to crumble. Netanyahu's action is a direct response to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' decision to sign 15 United Nations treaties in order to advance its application for statehood. Netanyahu's order does not apply to Israel's leading negotiator Tzipi Livni or to defense and security officials. Netanyahu is threatening to impose economic sanctions on the West Bank if the Palestinians continue to pursue unilateral action regarding statehood. In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, US Secretary of State John Kerry said Israel's announcement of settlement development in East Jerusalem was responsible for the latest impasse in the peace negotiations, which are set to expire on April 29th.

Noray: Two car bombs in the Syrian city of Homs killed at least 21 people and injured over 100. The Karam al-Loz district of Homs, where the bombs were detonated, is inhabited mainly by Alawites—the Shi'ite sect to which Syrian President Bashar al-Assad belongs. This violence in Homs was preceded by the recent assassination of a 75 year old Jesuit priest in the Old City district, an area controlled by Syrian opposition forces. Father Frans Van der Lugt lived in Homs for over 50 years and had continuously offered Muslim and Christian communities refuge throughout the conflict. The identity and motive of Father van der Lugt's assailant is unknown.

Okabe-Jawdat: A bombing in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad killed more than 20 people and wounded dozens. The bomb, which was hidden in a fruit crate, exploded in a market full of civilians. Soon after the attack, the Taliban released a statement condemning the act, calling it, quote “regrettable and un-Islamic.” A different separatist group, the little-known United Baluch Army, claimed responsibility for the bombing. They have fought for the independence of the Baluchistan Province, and until now, most of their fighting has remained in the region. The involvement of the United Baluch Army comes at a tense time for Pakistan, as the government is deeply involved in peace talks with a more prominent militant group in the region, the Taliban.

Noray: The United States has named Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis – or A-B-M – a foreign terrorist organization. This designation, announced by the United States Department of State this week, makes it a crime to knowingly aid the group. It also allows the US government to freeze ABM assets, but it is not known whether the organization has any holdings in the United States. While the State Department noted that the Sinai-based Egyptian militant group is not formally linked to al Qaeda, the report insists that the two organizations have ideological connections. Among the terrorist activities of the group listed by the US State Department are an assassination attempt on Egypt’s Interior Minister last year, a missile attack on Cairo in January, and rockets fired at the city of Eilat, in southern Israel.

Okabe-Jawdat: Car bombs exploded across Baghdad this week, killing at least 24 people and injuring dozens. Most of the areas targeted in the attacks were predominantly Shiite neighborhoods. No group has come forward to claim responsibility for the attacks, but the bombings bore a resemblance to strategies used by al-Qaeda inspired groups, as well as Sunni insurgents. The attacks were the latest in a string of violent incidents across the country. According to United Nations estimates, over 8,800 people died in attacks in Iraq last year, and the violence has only continued to rise in recent months. These most recent bombings have raised concerns about the stability of the upcoming elections. The national elections, which will take place on April 30, mark the first democratic vote in the country since the United States withdrew its troops in 2011.

Noray: Over the past week, Kenyan authorities have arrested over 3000 Somalis and deported 82 as part of an ongoing security crackdown in response to a spate of terrorism in Kenya. According to Kenya’s Interior Minister, Joseph Ole-Lenku, the deported Somalis were in Kenya illegally and lacked proper documentation. The most recent incident was a grenade attack on April 1st in Nairobi that killed six people in Eastleigh, a predominantly Somali neighborhood in Kenya. Kenya has blamed the recent attacks on the Somali militant group al-Shabab. Kenya police spokesman Masoud Mwinyi said that 447 Somalis remain in custody under anti-terrorism laws. The detained Somalis are being held in Kasarani Stadium, a sports stadium on the outskirts of Nairobi. Reports of human rights violations by police officers have led the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights to believe that the detainees are being held in degrading and inhumane conditions. Religious clerics and leading members of the Kenyan parliament have accused the security forces of unfairly targeting Somalis in the current security crackdown.

Okabe-Jawdat: If you want to hear more from War News Radio, visit us online at War News Radio.o-r-g. This week’s newscast was written and edited by Caroline Batten, Jay Clayton,

Joelle Hageboutros, Allison Hrabar, Sabrina Merold, Tyler Welsh, Chloe Wittenberg, and Henry Zhang. I'm Dylan Okabe-Jawdat.

Noray: And I'm Asma Noray. Until next time, thanks for listening.