

January 2010

AFGHANISTAN

Jan. 13—The UN reports that over 2,400 Afghan civilians died in 2009 in war-related violence, most of them killed by the Taliban and other insurgent groups. The UN also reports that US and NATO forces suffered 520 deaths on the year, a marked increase from the 295 recorded in 2008.

Jan. 24—The nation's electoral commission announces that, due to financial and logistical problems, as well as the threat of violence, it will delay until September parliamentary elections previously scheduled for May. The announcement is applauded by foreign governments and international organizations, which had been concerned that early voting would suffer from the same legitimacy problems that plagued a presidential election in August 2009.

Jan. 27—NATO reaches a deal with Kazakhstan allowing the alliance to transport supplies to Afghanistan through the Central Asian republic. With NATO already having signed similar deals with Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, the way is now clear for supplies to reach Afghanistan from Europe via an overland route.

Jan. 31—President Hamid Karzai announces that, with an eye toward achieving political reconciliation in his strife-ridden country, an assembly will be convened within 6 weeks involving representatives of the government and of groups such as the Taliban. Karzai is also preparing a plan to offer Taliban members jobs, education, and other benefits in exchange for their defection from the insurgent Islamist organization.

CHILE

Jan. 16—In a runoff election, wealthy businessman and former senator Sebastián Piñera is elected president, winning 52% of the vote compared to 48% for a former president, Eduardo Frei. Piñera is the 1st conservative in over 5 decades to win the presidency through democratic means. He is not expected to diverge radically from the economic policies of the incumbent president, left-leaning Michelle Bachelet. Bachelet is popular with voters but her political coalition is perceived as lacking new ideas.

CHINA

Jan. 10—Data released by China's customs office show that the country eclipsed Germany in 2009 as the world's top exporter, marking a milestone in the nation's unprecedentedly rapid economic modernization.

Jan. 12—The US-based internet search company Google announces that, in response to electronic attacks on its computer systems originating in China, it will no longer cooperate with the Chinese government to censor the internet. Google also says it might terminate its Chinese operations entirely. Another 20 or so companies, mostly US-based, were victims of the cyber attacks.

Jan. 29—The administration of US President Barack Obama approves a package of arms sales to Taiwan. The package includes Patriot missiles and Black Hawk helicopters, but a decision on selling F-16 fighter planes to Taiwan is deferred. China, which views self-governing and democratic Taiwan as a province of the People's Republic, reacts to the move by canceling some military-to-military contacts with the US and imposing sanctions on some US companies involved in manufacturing the arms.

CROATIA

Jan. 10—A runoff presidential election is won by Ivo Josipovic of the Social Democrat Party. Josipovic wins 60% of the vote,

compared to 40% won by the more conservative Milan Bandic, the mayor of Zagreb. Josipovic vows to pursue policies that will allow Croatia to join the EU in 2012.

GUINEA

Jan. 18—Ahead of elections scheduled for this year, the military junta that has ruled Guinea since December 2008 appoints opposition figure Jean-Marie Doré as prime minister. Since a September 2009 incident in which soldiers massacred over 150 political opponents and raped many women, the junta has been under intense international pressure to begin restoring democracy. The choice of Doré is widely seen as a constructive one.

HAITI

Jan. 12—A powerful earthquake, with its epicenter near the capital city of Port-au-Prince, strikes Haiti. The death toll is difficult to determine with any certainty but the government produces an estimate of 150,000. In addition, the disaster leaves about 1 million people homeless. A massive international relief effort follows, but is hampered by the ruin of the nation's transportation infrastructure and by the near-collapse of its government.

IRAN

Jan. 16—Agreement is reached in a meeting among the US, Russia, China, France, Great Britain, and Germany that further punitive action by the UN Security Council against Iran may be warranted due to the country's inadequate responses to international concerns about its nuclear program. China, however, signals that it opposes immediate imposition of further sanctions.

IRAQ

Jan. 14—Iraq's electoral commission bars about 500 candidates from participating in parliamentary elections scheduled for March. The banned candidates include both Shiites and Sunnis, but the majority are seen as rivals to the governing bloc of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. The decision, which provokes boycott threats, seems to undercut political reconciliation efforts.

JAPAN

Jan. 15—Japan brings to an end its Indian Ocean refueling mission that has supported the NATO military effort in Afghanistan. Military observers say the change will have no effect on the conduct of the Afghan war, but the US had heavily lobbied the Japanese to continue their participation.

KOREA, NORTH

Jan. 11—North Korea proposes negotiating with the US to establish a formal peace treaty ending the Korean War, which was concluded in 1953 with a truce. Pyongyang predicates terminating its nuclear weapons program on the conclusion of a peace treaty, but other nations involved in the North Korean nuclear question—the US, South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia—have emphasized addressing nuclear weapons before negotiating a peace treaty.

NIGERIA

Jan. 28—US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, along with the foreign ministers of Britain, France, and the EU, sends an open letter to Nigeria's government urging that, amid a political crisis caused

by the prolonged absence from the country of President Umaru Yar'Adua, constitutional processes be respected. In November Yar'Adua traveled to Saudi Arabia to receive medical treatment without formally handing over power to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan. Yar'Adua has not returned, nor is it certain that he will.

PAKISTAN

Jan. 1—A suicide bomber believed to be a member of the Taliban detonates an explosive-laden truck at a volleyball game in the village of Shah Hassan Khel in Pakistan's northwest, killing at least 89. Authorities suggest the village was attacked because residents were forming a militia in support of the country's government, which in recent months has increased its efforts to gain control over regions in which the Taliban have operated freely.

Jan. 12—The Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, an independent research organization, reports that over 3,000 Pakistani civilians were killed in 2009 in militant attacks. The civilian death toll is higher than in neighboring, war-torn Afghanistan.

RUSSIA

Jan. 15—Russia's parliament approves a reform plan for the European Court of Human Rights after long having opposed such reform. Changes to the court will allow it to process a backlog of cases, many of which have been filed against Russia. The parliament's decision is seen as part of a Russian effort to improve ties with the country's neighbors in Europe.

SRI LANKA

Jan. 26—President Mahinda Rajapaksa wins reelection in a contest pitting him against former army commander Sarath Fonseka.

Rajapaksa wins 58% of the vote compared to 40% for Fonseka. The government, concerned that Fonseka will refuse to accept the official results, surrounds Fonseka's hotel with military forces, raids his offices, and detains some of his staff and supporters. Both Rajapaksa and Fonseka played key roles in bringing to an end in 2009 the country's long-running civil war fought against Tamil rebels.

UNITED STATES

Jan. 8—The Labor Department reports that the American economy lost 85,000 jobs in December, a figure later revised to 150,000. The news dashes hopes raised by November's employment gains that the country's jobs situation would begin to improve rapidly. US unemployment has stood at 10% or higher since October 2009.

Jan. 29—The Commerce Department reports that the US economy grew at a rate of 5.7% in the 4th quarter of 2009. This rapid rate of GDP growth is attributed mostly to companies' restocking their inventories after an extended period of letting them dwindle. Consumer spending, by far the largest element of the country's GDP, grew at a very slow rate.

VENEZUELA

Jan. 8—President Hugo Chávez, presiding over an economy that contracted at a rate of 2.9% in 2009, announces a drastic devaluation of Venezuela's currency, the bolívar. The bolívar, which was previously valued at 2.15 to the US dollar, will now trade at 4.3. The move is intended in part to make Venezuelan exports more competitive. ■

FROM THE ARCHIVES

What Current History authors were saying . . .

5 years ago

The pull of Europe remains weak, while the bread-and-butter policies citizens care about most, including the welfare and identity issues that dominated the referendum debates, remain almost exclusively in national hands. The failure of European elections to generate high turnouts or focus on EU issues over the years suggests that citizens fail to participate in EU politics not because they are blocked from doing so, but because they have insufficient incentive.

ANDREW MORAVCSIK
A Too Perfect Union?
Why Europe Said "No"
November 2005

10 years ago

The future of Kosovo as an international protectorate appears likely to mime the experience of Bosnia, namely, alternating periods of progress and regress in democratization and interethnic reconciliation, a condition reflecting the international community's vacillating commitment to Balkan transformation. But in the longer run, whatever the political evolution of neighboring Serbia and Montenegro, the Albanians of Kosovo appear determined to pursue their state-building dreams.

LENARD J. COHEN
Kosovo: "Nobody's Country"
March 2000