

# January 2013

## INTERNATIONAL

### Asian Maritime Disputes

Jan. 22—The Philippines says it will challenge China's claims in the South China Sea before a UN tribunal under the Convention on the Law of the Sea. Meanwhile, a Japanese envoy arrives in China with a letter from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for Chinese President Xi Jinping, in an apparent effort to ease tensions over a disputed island chain in the East China Sea, known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China. Chinese and Japanese ships and aircraft in recent weeks have confronted each other near the islands.

### Kashmir

Jan. 6—Indian and Pakistani troops exchange fire at the border of the disputed territory of Kashmir; 1 Pakistani soldier is killed. In subsequent clashes, called the worst fighting since a cease-fire took effect in 2003, 2 Indian troops and 2 more Pakistanis die.

### AFGHANISTAN

Jan. 11—After meeting in Washington with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, US President Barack Obama says the US will speed up its transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan forces and will retain only a supporting role as of the spring. Obama also indicates that the US will keep only a small number of troops in Afghanistan after the NATO mission ends in 2014.

### ALGERIA

Jan. 16—Islamist militants from a group called Al Mulathameen attack a natural gas installation in the eastern Algerian desert, near the Libyan border. They take 100s of workers hostage, including many foreigners. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a Mali-based Algerian militant and former member of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, claims responsibility for organizing the attack on the plant, saying it was in retaliation for a French military intervention in Mali that began days earlier.

Jan. 17—Algerian troops attack the plant, freeing many hostages and killing some of the militants, but others continue to resist and hold more workers hostage.

Jan. 20—Algerian troops end the siege with a final assault, despite pleas from foreign governments to seek a negotiated settlement to protect their citizens' lives.

Jan. 21—Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal says 37 foreign hostages were killed, as well as 1 Algerian hostage and 29 militants; 3 militants were captured.

### CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Jan. 11—The government and rebel forces sign a cease-fire agreement, under which President François Bozizé will stay in office until his term ends in 2016, but the 2 sides will form a coalition government to be headed by a prime minister from the opposition. The rebels had advanced toward the capital, Bangui, in December 2012, but were halted by peacekeeping troops from neighboring countries, including Angola and South Africa.

### CHINA

Jan. 6—Journalists at the prominent newspaper *Southern Weekend* in Guangzhou declare a strike in protest of censorship after a propaganda official rewrites an editorial, replacing calls for constitutional rights with praise for the communist system.

Jan. 7—Hundreds of anti-censorship protesters gather outside *Southern Weekend's* headquarters. The journalists also receive a surge of support from online commentators.

Jan. 8—The authorities and the journalists reach an agreement to avert a strike, with the authorities reportedly making some concessions on editorial independence.

### CUBA

Jan. 13—The government eases travel rules, ending a requirement for Cubans to obtain exit visas for trips abroad.

### EGYPT

Jan. 13—A court overturns the conviction of former President Hosni Mubarak, and his sentence of life in prison, for failing to prevent the deaths of more than 800 protesters during the uprising that led to his ouster in February 2011.

Jan. 25—Violence breaks out across the country as demonstrators mark the 2nd anniversary of the revolution and express opposition to the current government of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood.

Jan. 26—Riots erupt in Port Said after 21 local soccer fans are sentenced to death for a February 2012 brawl with Cairo fans that left more than 70 dead. More than 30 people are killed in the rioting and the army is sent in after police lose control of the city.

### FRANCE

Jan. 11—Sakine Cansiz, a founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Kurdish militant group that has fought the Turkish government since the 1980s, is found murdered in Paris along with 2 other women at a Kurdish cultural center.

Jan. 21—Paris prosecutors charge Omer Guney, who they say served as a guide and driver for Cansiz, with the murders.

### GUATEMALA

Jan. 28—A judge orders former military ruler Efraín Ríos Montt, 86, to stand trial for genocide and crimes against humanity in connection with massacres of civilians during his 1982–83 rule, at the height of a 30-year civil war.

### INDIA

Jan. 23—In response to a December 2012 gang rape in New Delhi that left the female victim dead and led to mass protests, a government-appointed commission issues a report calling for reforms to address widespread discrimination and violence against women.

### ISRAEL

Jan. 22—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing Likud-Beiteinu party finishes 1st in a general election, taking 31 seats in the 120-seat Knesset (parliament). But a new centrist party, Yesh Atid, led by former television news anchor Yair Lapid, does unexpectedly well, taking 19 seats. Netanyahu and Lapid begin coalition talks, raising the prospect of a more moderate government than Netanyahu's previous one.

### JAPAN

Jan. 11—Recently elected Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announces a 10.3 trillion yen (\$116 billion) stimulus package of government spending to boost the stagnant economy.

Jan. 22—The central bank, under pressure from Abe to do more to encourage growth, says it will conduct "open-ended" asset purchases, and doubles its inflation target to a 2% annual rate.

**MALI**

Jan. 11—France launches air strikes against Islamist extremists who have controlled northern Mali since the spring of 2011. The immediate French objective is to halt an advance by the Islamists toward southern Mali. French President François Hollande says the French involvement will be limited to “preparing for the deployment of an African intervention force.”

Jan. 28—French and Malian forces take the ancient city of Timbuktu, a day after taking the eastern city of Gao. The Islamists flee before their advance, offering little resistance. Hollande declares that African troops will take over the task of pursuing the Islamists into the northern part of the country.

**NORTH KOREA**

Jan. 21—The UN Security Council unanimously approves a resolution condemning a December North Korean rocket launch widely seen as a test of ballistic missile technology. China, North Korea’s main ally, votes for the resolution but opposes any new sanctions related to the North’s nuclear weapons program.

Jan. 24—North Korea says it will conduct a “higher level” nuclear test, and warns explicitly that its nuclear program is “targeted” at the US, which it calls “the sworn enemy of the Korean people.”

**PAKISTAN**

Jan. 15—The Supreme Court orders the arrest of Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf, citing corruption allegations.

**SRI LANKA**

Jan. 13—President Mahinda Rajapaksa removes Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake from office, after she is impeached by parlia-

ment 2 days earlier for alleged corruption. The move is widely criticized as an attack on judicial independence.

**SYRIA**

Jan. 2—The UN high commissioner for human rights, Navi Pillay, says more than 60,000 people have died so far in nearly 2 years of fighting between President Bashar al-Assad’s regime and rebel forces, according to a new analysis. She deplors “the failure of the international community, in particular the Security Council, to stop the bloodletting.”

Jan. 30—Israeli warplanes reportedly carry out air strikes inside Syria. US officials say the strikes targeted a convoy believed to be carrying anti-aircraft missiles to the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. Syria says the attack hit a research facility in a Damascus suburb, which analysts say produces chemical weapons.

**UNITED STATES**

Jan. 30—The Commerce Department reports that according to preliminary data, US gross domestic product contracted 0.1% in the 4th quarter of 2012, the economy’s worst quarterly performance since 2009. The contraction was driven partly by sharp cuts to defense spending.

**VENEZUELA**

Jan. 10—President Hugo Chávez, in Cuba for cancer treatment, misses his inauguration ceremony after winning a new 6-year term in an October 2012 election. He has not been seen in public since undergoing surgery in Havana on Dec. 11. Vice President Nicolás Maduro, recently designated by Chávez as his successor, leads a Caracas crowd in an oath of loyalty to Chávez. ■

**FROM THE ARCHIVES**

*What Current History authors were saying . . .*

**5 years ago**

[T]he severity of Italy’s ongoing problems should not be underestimated. Like other countries in a globalizing world, Italy is less protected from outside forces than at any time in the recent past, and the willingness and ability of its political and economic actors to address the nation’s challenges have proved in many cases inadequate.

MICHAEL CALINGAERT  
*Italy’s Choice: Reform or Stagnation*  
March 2008

**10 years ago**

Western shortsightedness—an unwillingness to provide a few million dollars to rebuild the lives of hundreds of thousands of human beings—could once again result in decades of conflict and instability. The economic stinginess and the cultural chauvinism that produce this neglect could return to haunt Europe, ending any illusion that things have been made right in the Balkans.

ISA BLUMI  
*The Islamist Challenge in Kosova*  
March 2003