

March 2017

INTERNATIONAL

Cybersecurity

March 7—WikiLeaks releases more than 8,000 documents it says reveal the US Central Intelligence Agency's methods for overriding security features in cell phones, computers, and other devices and software applications. The CIA declines to comment but experts say the documents are probably genuine.

Nuclear proliferation

March 6—North Korea fires 4 missiles into the Sea of Japan, in the latest in a series of missile and nuclear tests that have raised regional concerns. The US military that day begins deployment of an antiballistic missile system, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System (THAAD), in South Korea. China warns the next day that the US and South Korea will face “consequences” for deploying THAAD, which China contends could neutralize its own nuclear deterrent, precipitating a regional arms race. South Korean companies have already faced retaliation in China, following earlier announcements of plans to deploy the missile-defense system if North Korean provocations continued.

March 17—Visiting Seoul, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warns that the Trump administration will not continue the US “policy of strategic patience” in dealing with North Korea. He says “all options are on the table,” including military force.

CHINA

March 26—Carrie Lam, the candidate favored by Beijing, is elected chief executive of Hong Kong, winning 67% percent of the votes cast by a 1,200-member committee stocked mostly with mainland loyalists, defeating former finance official John Tsang, who has more popular support according to polls. A day after the election, Hong Kong police file criminal charges for incitement and conspiracy to commit a public nuisance against 9 organizers of 2014 pro-democracy protests.

EGYPT

March 24—Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's authoritarian ruler for 3 decades before he was ousted by a popular uprising in early 2011, is released from detention. In 2012, he was sentenced to life in prison for conspiring with police to kill 100s of protesters, but that conviction was overturned. Mubarak, 88, was also convicted on corruption charges. The regime of the current president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, continues to detain many involved in the protests that toppled Mubarak at the height of the Arab Spring.

INDIA

March 11—Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wins a landslide victory in state assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, by far the nation's most populous state with 200 million residents. The result leaves Modi in a strong position ahead of national elections in 2019. The BJP March 18 appoints a hard-line Hindu cleric, Yogi Adityanath, as Uttar Pradesh's chief minister, raising concerns that Modi may be loosening restraints on the party's more intolerant elements.

NETHERLANDS

March 15—The far-right Party for Freedom, led by Geert Wilders, who campaigned on a platform of barring Muslim immigrants and exiting the European Union, gains seats in parliamentary

elections but ends up with just 20 in the 150-seat lower house. The result quells fears among European leaders, at least temporarily, that a populist, anti-EU wave would continue after Britain's June 2016 vote to exit the bloc. Incumbent Prime Minister Mark Rutte's center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, which borrowed some of Wilders' anti-immigrant rhetoric at the end of the campaign, loses ground but is the top finisher with 33 seats. Rutte excludes Wilders' party from coalition talks.

RUSSIA

March 26—In the largest protests against President Vladimir Putin's regime since 2012, 10s of 1,000s of Russians take to the streets in dozens of cities nationwide to denounce high-level corruption. The protests come in response to a call to action by Aleksei Navalny, an opposition leader and anticorruption campaigner who plans to challenge Putin in the 2018 presidential election. According to human-rights groups, more than 1,000 people are arrested in Moscow alone, including Navalny, who is sentenced March 27 to 15 days in jail for organizing the unauthorized demonstrations.

SOUTH AFRICA

March 31—President Jacob Zuma fires Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, who is widely respected internationally for maintaining economic stability and resisting corruption. Zuma's action draws sharp criticism from opposition parties and even from top officials within the ruling party, the African National Congress. In a rare public display of intraparty division, Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa calls the dismissal “unacceptable.”

SOUTH KOREA

March 10—The Constitutional Court upholds the National Assembly's December 2016 impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, making her the first president to be removed from office by the court. The ruling affirms findings that Park conspired with a confidante to extort 10s of millions of dollars in bribes from businesses. An election to pick her replacement is set for May 9. Park, the daughter of the late dictator Park Chung-hee, is arrested and jailed March 31.

UNITED KINGDOM

March 29—Prime Minister Theresa May sends a letter to European Council President Donald Tusk formally giving notice that the UK intends to withdraw from the EU, ending more than 40 years of membership in the bloc. The notification commences negotiations over the exit terms, a process scheduled to last 2 years. A slim majority of British voters favored leaving the EU in the June 2016 referendum

VENEZUELA

March 29—The Supreme Court, packed with loyalists of left-wing President Nicolás Maduro, issues a ruling authorizing the court to write legislation on its own, effectively shutting down the National Assembly, in which opposition parties have held a majority of seats since December 2015 elections. The head of the Organization of American States denounces the ruling as a “self-inflicted coup” amid deepening repression of the opposition in Venezuela. In a rare breach of government unity, Attorney General Luisa Ortega March 31 denounces the ruling as “a rupture in the constitutional order.” ■