

January 2018

INTERNATIONAL

Korean Peninsula

Jan. 1—In his annual New Year's Day speech, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, in an abrupt shift from his recent bellicose rhetoric, accepts a proposal from South Korean President Moon Jae-in that the 2 Koreas participate jointly in the Winter Olympics scheduled to begin in February in Pyeongchang, South Korea, and take other steps to ease tensions. Kim also hails recent advances his armed forces have made in developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. But his peaceful overtures are followed 2 days later by a reopening of a cross-border telephone hotline.

Jan. 17—Negotiators announce that Korean athletes will march together in the opening ceremony at the Olympics under 1 "united Korea" flag, and the women's ice hockey players will form a joint team.

Trade

Jan. 22—US trade officials announce tariffs ranging from 15 to 50 percent on imported solar panels and washing machines, in response to complaints from US manufacturers that they have been harmed by cheap imports. It is the 1st move by the Trump administration to deliver on the president's protectionist rhetoric with new tariffs. China and South Korea both criticize the action and say they may challenge it at the World Trade Organization.

Jan. 23—A group of 11 nations, from Chile and Canada to Vietnam and Japan, announce that they have completed negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a regional trade pact that the US had originally proposed and championed. Trump pulled the US out of the negotiations early in his presidency, but the remaining member nations expect to sign the deal in March.

BRAZIL

Jan. 24—An appeals court unanimously affirms a corruption and money laundering conviction against former President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, who left office in 2011 and is planning to run for a 3rd term. He is the front-runner in opinion polls ahead of the October election but could now be disqualified, though he will continue to appeal the conviction. The court increases his sentence from 9 to 12 years in prison.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Jan. 27—President Milos Zeman, a right-wing populist, narrowly wins reelection with 51.4% of the vote in a runoff against independent challenger Jiri Drahos, an academic who vowed to reaffirm the nation's commitment to the European Union. Zeman has been hostile toward the EU, especially its openness to immigration, and has pursued closer ties with Russia and China.

PAKISTAN

Jan. 4—US officials announce a suspension of most security assistance to Pakistan, including \$2 billion already budgeted, pending an assessment of steps taken by the country to crack down on elements of the Taliban and other extremist groups that have used safe havens in the border region to launch attacks on targets in Afghanistan including US-led coalition forces. Trump Jan. 1 had posted a tweet accusing Pakistan of repaying US aid with "lies & deceit."

SAUDI ARABIA

Jan. 30—Attorney General Sheikh Saud al-Mojeb announces that the government has collected more than \$100 billion through a corruption crackdown that led to the arrest in November of dozens of prominent businessmen and political figures. Among them were at least 11 members of the royal family, notably the billionaire investor Prince Alwaleed bin Talal. Most handed over assets to the government to settle the charges against them and have been released from detention in a Riyadh luxury hotel.

SYRIA

Jan. 21—Turkish armed forces begin an incursion into a Kurdish enclave in northern Syria. The offensive targets the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Kurdish militia that has received weapons and other support from the US to fight the Islamic State and is a key part of the Syrian Democratic Forces, which US officials have recently said they intend to train as a 30,000-strong "border-security force." Turkey says the YPG is a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Turkey, which has waged an intermittent insurgency for decades.

TUNISIA

Jan. 1—Economic reform measures including a range of tax and price hikes take effect, spurring widespread protests. The Interior Ministry Jan. 13 says 773 people have been arrested in connection with the demonstrations. The government is trying to lower the budget deficit and implement other reforms required as part of a deal that secured a \$2.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund. Tunisia is 1 of the few countries where democratic reforms ushered in by the Arab uprisings (which began in Tunisia in 2010) have held, but the economy has stagnated and unemployment has risen to around 15%.

UNITED KINGDOM

Jan. 11—Ecuador announces that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has been living in its embassy in London for more than 5 years, was granted citizenship a month ago and asks the UK to give him diplomatic immunity so he can leave the country without fear of arrest. The request is rejected. Assange has been charged with jumping bail in the UK, which had sought to extradite him to Sweden to face rape charges that were dropped in 2017. Assange fears that he could be extradited to the US, where he may face far more serious charges for publishing leaked government documents.

UNITED STATES

Jan. 8—The Department of Homeland Security announces that Salvadorans who have had temporary protected status in the US since a pair of earthquakes devastated El Salvador in 2001 will have until September 2019 to leave the country voluntarily or face deportation. There are an estimated 200,000 Salvadorans who have such status, and they have nearly as many US-born children. US officials say El Salvador has recovered from the earthquakes so there is no reason to further extend the protected status, but immigrant advocates argue that the Salvadorans cannot safely return to a nation that is struggling to cope with 1 of the highest homicide rates in the world. The move is in line with a series of Trump administration actions to limit immigration. It previously announced that temporary protected status (which includes the right to reside and work in the US) for immigrants from 3 other troubled nations—Nicaragua, Haiti, and Sudan—will also end after a final extension. ■