

April–July 2018

INTERNATIONAL

Iranian Nuclear Program

May 8—US President Donald Trump withdraws from the 2015 deal that lifted Western sanctions on Iran in exchange for Tehran's commitment to limit uranium enrichment and other work that could produce nuclear weapons. Trump rejects pleas from Britain, France, and Germany that the agreement has worked and is the best way to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions. Iran says it will continue to honor the deal as long as the remaining signatories do as well.

July 14—The US rejects pleas to exempt European companies doing business in Iran from the newly reinstated sanctions.

Korean Peninsula

April 26—North Korean leader Kim Jong-un steps across the border to meet South Korean President Moon Jae-in for talks at the village of Panmunjom, in the 1st meeting between leaders of the 2 Koreas since 2007. Moon and Kim also briefly cross over to the North Korean side together. Moon says they agreed to work toward “the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” and seek a formal end to the Korean War, which was suspended by an armistice in 1953. Kim and Moon meet again in the Demilitarized Zone on May 26.

June 12—Kim and Trump meet in Singapore, in the 1st summit between sitting leaders of the US and North Korea. They sign a document in which North Korea expresses its “commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” in exchange for “security guarantees” from the United States. The agreement lacks details such as a timetable and verification procedures. Trump says the US military will suspend joint exercises with the South Korean armed forces.

Trade

May 31—Invoking national security, the US imposes tariffs of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminum from Mexico, Canada, and the European Union. They retaliate by raising tariffs on US goods including agricultural products, bourbon, and Harley-Davidson motorcycles.

July 6—Following weeks of escalating, back-and-forth threats, the US imposes new tariffs on \$34 billion worth of imports from China. Immediately responding in kind, China imposes higher tariffs on \$34 billion of US imports.

July 31—US officials say Trump is considering a new 25% tariff on an additional \$200 billion worth of goods imported from China.

ARMENIA

April 23—Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan resigns following days of protests. He was appointed just 6 days earlier, after his 2nd term as president ended. The protests are led by opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan, who has called for early parliamentary elections.

May 8—The National Assembly votes 59-42 to name Pashinyan as interim prime minister. The vote comes a week after the legislature, where Sargsyan's Republican Party holds 58 of 105 seats, rejected his bid. Pashinyan responded by calling a nationwide general strike.

AUSTRALIA

June 28—Parliament approves national security legislation that outlaws foreign interference in domestic politics, cracks down on industrial espionage, and requires lobbyists for foreign governments to register. The legislation was prompted by concerns about China's growing influence in Australia.

CAMBODIA

July 30—The ruling Cambodian People's Party, led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has held power for 33 years, announces that it won 78% of the vote and all 125 contested parliamentary seats in elections a day earlier. The opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party was outlawed in 2017 and its leaders have been either imprisoned or forced into exile.

COLOMBIA

June 17—Iván Duque, a conservative populist and critic of a 2016 peace agreement that ended 5 decades of armed conflict with leftist guerrillas, is elected president. Duque wins 54% of the vote in the 2nd round, defeating Gustavo Petro, a former guerrilla and mayor of Bogotá. Duque says he will revise the peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia to stiffen punishments for rebels who committed war crimes.

CUBA

April 19—Miguel Díaz-Canel, handpicked as the sole candidate to replace Raúl Castro, is elected president by a vote of 603 to 1 in the National Assembly. A former vice president, education minister, and provincial chief, Díaz-Canel, 57, is the 1st leader of the nation since the end of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 who is not a Castro. Fidel, who died at 90 in 2016, handed power in 2006 to his brother Raúl, now 86, who remains head of the armed forces and the Communist Party.

ETHIOPIA

April 2—Abiy Ahmed becomes prime minister, the 1st from the Oromo ethnic group, which has been at the center of protests against political and economic repression that led to the resignation of his predecessor, Hailemariam Desalegn, in February. Though he was chosen by the ruling People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, Abiy soon lifts a state of emergency, releases imprisoned journalists and opposition leaders, and initiates economic reforms.

July 9—Ethiopia and Eritrea declare an end to a 2-decade-long “state of war” that started with 2 years of fierce but inconclusive fighting over a disputed border and has left more than 80,000 dead. The declaration follows a July 8 visit by Ahmed to Eritrea's capital, Asmara, where he and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki announced plans to restore diplomatic relations and trade.

HUNGARY

April 8—Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's coalition wins a general election on an anti-immigrant and anti-EU platform. Orbán's Fidesz party and its ally, the Christian Democrats, win just under 50% of the national vote. But results from a separate ballot for local seats in districts drawn to favor Fidesz allow the party to retain a 2/3rds supermajority. That has enabled it to amend the constitution and consolidate power, drawing rebukes from the EU for eroding democratic institutions.

IRAQ

May 12—In national elections, the Saeroon Alliance led by Muqtada al-Sadr, a Shia cleric and nationalist, wins 54 of the 328 seats in parliament, more than any other faction. The Victory Alliance of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi finishes 3rd with 42 seats.

June 23—Sadr unexpectedly joins forces with Abadi, announcing that their parties will form a new government. Sadr had previously said he would form a ruling coalition with Hadi al-Ameri, a pro-Iranian Shia militia leader whose party came in 2nd.

ISRAEL

May 14—On the day that a new US embassy opens in Jerusalem, Israeli security forces shoot and kill dozens of Palestinians demonstrating in the Gaza Strip as some try to cross the border fence. According to Palestinian health officials, 58 are killed and more than 1,200 wounded.

ITALY

June 1—President Sergio Mattarella swears in a new prime minister, lawyer and political novice Giuseppe Conte, who represents an alliance of populist parties that finished 1st and 2nd in national elections in March: the anti-establishment Five Star Movement, the top vote-winner, and the anti-immigration League.

MALAYSIA

May 9—An opposition coalition led by 92-year-old former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad wins a majority in parliamentary elections, ousting the ruling coalition he once led, which has ruled the country since it gained independence from Britain in 1957. The Barisan Nasional coalition, now led by Najib Razak, was widely expected to prevail once again, despite accusations that Najib and his associates and relatives stole hundreds of millions of dollars from a state investment fund.

May 16—Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim is released from prison after receiving a royal pardon that nullifies a 2014 sodomy conviction. Anwar served as deputy prime minister under Mahathir in the 1990s but was ousted by him and jailed in 1998.

MEXICO

July 1—Andrés Manuel López Obrador, leader of the left-wing National Regeneration Movement (Morena), is elected president on his 3rd try in a landslide fueled by widespread disgust with corruption, drug violence, and the performance of outgoing President Enrique Peña Nieto of the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, who was limited to a single 6-year term. López Obrador, the former mayor of Mexico City, wins 53% of the vote, more than double the share of his closest rival. Morena's broad coalition also wins majorities in both houses of Congress.

NICARAGUA

May 30—A protest march on Nicaragua's Mother's Day in honor of the mothers of students killed at recent antigovernment rallies is met with gunfire by pro-government paramilitary groups, leaving at least 15 more dead. The protests, which started in opposition to social security reforms that would have curtailed benefits, now include calls for President Daniel Ortega's ouster and expedited free and fair elections to pick his successor. By the end of July, the death toll surpasses 350.

PAKISTAN

July 6—Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison on corruption charges that triggered his ouster in 2017. He is arrested July 25 when he returns to Lahore from London.

July 25—Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), the party led by former cricket star Imran Khan, finishes 1st in national elections, taking 115 of 269 seats at stake in the National Assembly. Several minor parties are expected to join a governing coalition that will name Khan prime minister. The PTI's victory ends decades of dominance by the 2 parties led by the Sharif and Bhutto family dynasties. The election is marred by allegations that the military interfered on the PTI's behalf.

RUSSIA

May 24—A Dutch-led international team of investigators concludes that a missile that brought down a Malaysian Airlines passenger jet as it passed over Ukraine in July 2014 "originated from" a Russian military unit, though it could have been fired by a Russian-backed Ukrainian separatist group. The Russian-made

anti-aircraft missile that killed all 298 on board had not previously been directly linked to the Russian military.

July 16—Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin hold a summit meeting in Helsinki, Finland. At a joint press conference following a meeting without aides, Trump casts doubt on the conclusions of US intelligence agencies that Russia meddled in the 2016 US presidential election and suggests that he places greater trust in Putin's denial of responsibility. US National Intelligence Director Dan Coats issues a statement reiterating that the agencies' assessment of Russian interference has not changed.

SPAIN

June 1—Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy is ousted by a no-confidence vote in parliament a week after a former treasurer of his conservative Popular Party (PP) was sentenced to 33 years in prison for his role in running a campaign slush fund; 28 others were convicted in connection with the corrupt scheme, and the PP was fined. Rajoy, who became prime minister in 2011, is replaced by Pedro Sánchez, the leader of the Socialist Party, which brought the motion to oust Rajoy but has only 84 seats in the 350-seat parliament and relies on conditional support from parties including Basque and Catalan nationalists and the left-wing populist Podemos party.

SYRIA

April 3—Trump instructs military commanders to prepare to withdraw the roughly 2,000 US troops stationed in Syria within months.

April 13—The US, France, and Britain launch coordinated missile strikes on 3 facilities linked to chemical-weapons attacks, the latest of which allegedly killed more than 40 people in a rebel-backed suburb of Damascus April 7. US officials emphasize the strike is a limited punishment for chemical weapons use and does not herald deeper involvement in the Syrian war.

May 10—Israeli warplanes attack dozens of Iranian military installations in Syria. Israeli officials say the strikes are in retaliation for an Iranian rocket attack launched from Syria on Israeli positions in the Golan Heights.

TURKEY

June 24—President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wins a 2nd 5-year term with 53% of the vote in the 1st national election since voters in 2017 narrowly approved a referendum proposal to give the president vastly expanded executive powers. European election observers say the opposition was disadvantaged by the ruling party's control of the media and limits on free assembly under a state of emergency.

UNITED KINGDOM

July 12—Prime Minister Theresa May releases a white paper outlining proposed terms for leaving the EU, more than 2 years after a narrow vote for "Brexit" in a referendum and with less than 9 months left to negotiate an agreement before the official exit date. May proposes retaining a single market for goods but diverging in other areas including financial services and immigration.

VENEZUELA

May 20—President Nicolás Maduro wins a 2nd term with 68% of the vote in an election with official turnout of just 46%, down from 80% in 2013. With the country facing economic collapse and the government repressing protests, many voters heeded calls for a boycott after the most prominent opposition candidates and parties were barred from competing.

YEMEN

June 19—A Saudi-led war against the Iran-backed Houthi militia intensifies with an all-out assault on the vital port city of Al Hudaydah, one of the few conduits for food and humanitarian supplies to a population facing famine. ■