

October 2018

INTERNATIONAL

Iran Nuclear Deal

Oct. 3—The International Court of Justice in The Hague, in a case brought by Iran, issues an interim ruling that some of the sanctions recently reimposed on Iran by the US, including those covering humanitarian goods and civil aviation, are illegal and must be lifted. President Donald Trump announced in May that he was pulling the US out of a 2015 multilateral agreement that set restrictions on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for ending the sanctions.

Trade

Oct. 1—After months of acrimony and tit-for-tat tariffs, Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announce a deal on a new trade agreement that will include Mexico and replace NAFTA. Called the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, it averts a US threat to sharply increase tariffs on automobiles from Canada, which agrees to ease tariff barriers to US dairy products. The agreement includes a dispute resolution mechanism demanded by Canadian negotiators, but does not roll back recently hiked US tariffs on Canadian aluminum and steel.

US-China Relations

Oct. 4—US Vice President Mike Pence gives a speech in Washington harshly criticizing Beijing for a long list of alleged transgressions including stealing intellectual property, bullying its neighbors, suppressing human rights at home, and meddling in US elections. Many observers characterize the speech as a declaration of a new Cold War. The Chinese foreign ministry dismisses Pence's criticism but says China remains committed to "win-win cooperation" with the US.

BRAZIL

Oct. 28—Far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro is elected president, an abrupt change of course for a nation that had chosen candidates of the leftist Workers' Party (PT) in the previous 4 elections. Bolsonaro wins 55% of the vote in a runoff against PT candidate Fernando Haddad. The result reflects popular support for Bolsonaro's tough talk on crime, while the PT has been tarnished by presiding over a recession and by corruption scandals that led to the imprisonment of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, ending his comeback bid. Bolsonaro, a congressman and former army officer, has made many incendiary comments denigrating minorities and women, as well as praising the dictatorship that ruled from 1964 to 1985 and its use of torture.

CAMEROON

Oct. 22—The incumbent Paul Biya, who has ruled for 36 years, is declared the winner with 71% of the vote in a presidential election held Oct. 7, amid increasing violence in a conflict between English- and French-speaking Cameroonians. Opposition leader Maurice Kamto, an Anglophone who is credited with just 14% of the vote, rejects the result, citing fraud and widespread violence that suppressed turnout. Turnout was just 10% in English-speaking regions after separatists called for a boycott. The secession movement has been fueled by the government's harsh crackdown on activists demanding the appointment of more English-speaking teachers and judges in Anglophone parts of the country.

CHINA

Oct. 23—A 34-mile-long bridge linking Hong Kong and Macau with the city of Zhuhai on the mainland opens for traffic, tying the offshore special administrative regions more closely to China. It is the longest sea bridge in the world, costing \$20 billion, and a key part of China's plan to more fully integrate cities in the heavily populated region billed as the Greater Bay Area. Critics warn it will help China tighten its grip on Hong Kong and Macau, and further erode the degree of autonomy they have retained to date.

GERMANY

Oct. 29—A day after her Christian Democratic Union fares poorly in elections in the state of Hesse, the latest in a series of electoral setbacks, Chancellor Angela Merkel announces that she will not seek reelection as party leader in December or a 5th term as chancellor in the next national election, due in 2021. She says she intends to stay on as chancellor until then, hoping her move will stabilize the fractious coalition government.

SAUDI ARABIA

Oct. 23—Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a speech in parliament says the Saudi exile Jamal Khashoggi, a *Washington Post* columnist, was the victim of a "premeditated murder" at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul Oct. 2. Turkish officials have been leaking evidence to reporters that suggests a Saudi hit squad traveled to Turkey intending to kill the journalist, a critic of the Saudi monarchy, on the orders of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman—a rival to Erdoğan for regional influence.

Oct. 30—US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo calls on Saudi Arabia to declare a cease-fire in war in Yemen. The war, in which a Saudi-led coalition seeks to oust the Iran-backed Houthi rebels who seized the capital in 2015, has left millions in danger of starvation; the Saudis have been accused of indiscriminate bombing. On Oct. 31, British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt also calls for a cease-fire. It is the most pointed criticism of Saudi Arabia to date by the kingdom's top 2 arms suppliers, as Riyadh faces heightened scrutiny following the Khashoggi allegations.

SRI LANKA

Oct. 26—President Maithripala Sirisena suspends Parliament, dismisses the elected prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and replaces him with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Sirisena says the move is necessary to avert an assassination plot by the Indian secret service. Wickremesinghe, whose party holds the majority in Parliament, rejects his dismissal as unconstitutional. But China is quick to congratulate Rajapaksa, who approved a deal for a Chinese company to build the port of Hambantota, which was later leased back to China for 99 years when Sri Lanka was unable to keep up with debt payments. The return of Rajapaksa raises alarms among the Tamil minority, which suffered heavy casualties when Sri Lankan armed forces brutally crushed a Tamil insurgency a decade ago during his presidency.

SYRIA

Oct. 27—The leaders of Russia, Turkey, France, and Germany meet in Istanbul to discuss ways to bring an end to the nearly 7-year-old war in Syria. Although the meeting yields no breakthrough, the 4 say they support a UN-backed effort to set up a Syrian committee to revise the constitution as a step toward elections. ■