

# December 2018

## INTERNATIONAL

### US-China Relations

Dec. 1—The presidents of the US and China, Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, meet in Buenos Aires on the sidelines of the G20 summit, the annual gathering of leaders of industrialized nations, and agree to a truce in an escalating trade war. Trump says he will hold off on a new round of 25% tariffs on Chinese imports that he had threatened to impose Jan. 1, and Xi pledges to increase purchases of US products. The 2 leaders set a 90-day deadline for reaching a comprehensive trade deal.

Dec. 5—Responding to a US extradition request, Canadian authorities arrest Meng Wanzhou, chief financial officer and daughter of the founder of Huawei Technologies, China's largest telecommunications company. She has been charged in US federal court with defrauding banks in a scheme to circumvent US sanctions on Iran. In apparent retaliation, China within days arrests 3 Canadians, including a former diplomat, on charges of endangering national security.

### BAHRAIN

Dec. 1—Six women are elected to the lower house of parliament, doubling their number in the 40-seat chamber. However, opposition supporters boycotted the election. The main opposition parties have been outlawed, including Al-Wefaq, which represented the Shia majority in a nation ruled by a Sunni royal family; its leader was sentenced to life in prison in November for allegedly spying for Qatar.

### BANGLADESH

Dec. 30—The ruling Awami League wins a lopsided victory in violence-marred parliamentary elections, clearing the way for a 3rd consecutive 5-year term for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Candidates for the ruling alliance win 90% of contested seats, but opposition leaders assert that the vote was rigged after a campaign of intimidation and politically motivated prosecutions of government critics. Former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, head of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, has been jailed since February on corruption charges.

### CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF

Dec. 30—Widespread voting irregularities mar a presidential election to choose a successor to Joseph Kabila, who has held office since 2001. The election had been delayed for 2 years. Both opposition front-runner Martin Fayulu and Kabila's chosen successor, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, claim victory, but the national election commission delays the release of official results. The commission had postponed voting until March 2019 in 3 opposition strongholds, citing an Ebola outbreak.

### FRANCE

Dec. 10—Following weeks of violent protests in Paris and across the country against his economic policies, President Emmanuel Macron addresses the nation, acknowledging the “anger and indignation” of those who view him as favoring the rich. He announces a package of tax cuts, a supplement to the minimum wage, and other relief for the middle and working classes.

### INDIA

Dec. 11—In elections in 5 key states, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) suffers its worst electoral setback in years, losing over

100 legislative seats in the northern “Hindi belt,” long seen as a bastion for its brand of Hindu nationalism. The opposition Congress party unexpectedly wins in 3 states formerly controlled by the BJP: Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. National parliamentary elections are to be held by May.

### ITALY

Dec. 19—The populist governing coalition of the right-wing League and the anti-establishment Five Star Movement reaches a deal with the European Commission and agrees to reduce its planned deficit spending to avoid penalties for violating the Eurozone's fiscal rules. The government backs away from a confrontation after initially defying pressure to revise a 2019 budget loaded with tax cuts and spending increases that would have added to the national debt, already 1 of Europe's highest at over 130% of GDP.

### POLAND

Dec. 17—Acceding to an EU demand, President Andrzej Duda signs a measure reinstating judges who had been ousted from the Supreme Court by a July law setting a mandatory retirement age, which was seen as a bid by the ruling Law and Justice party to fill the bench with loyalists. In October, the European Court of Justice ordered the Polish government to reinstate the judges. The European Commission, denouncing the purge as an affront to the rule of law, initiated a process that could have stripped Poland of its EU voting rights had it not backed down.

### SYRIA

Dec. 19—Trump announces on Twitter that he has ordered the withdrawal of all 2,000 US troops remaining in Syria within 30 days. The announcement, which catches his own advisers by surprise, raises doubts about US objectives in Syria, such as eradicating ISIS and countering Iranian influence. It also exposes the US's Kurdish allies, who have led the ground war against ISIS, to attack by Turkish forces. Trump insists the troops can come home because the war against ISIS has been won, though many observers call that claim premature. Defense Secretary James Mattis Dec. 20 announces his resignation in a letter indirectly criticizing the president for undermining US alliances. Mattis says he will step down in 2 months, but Trump Dec. 23 announces that he will vacate his post by the end of the week.

### UNITED KINGDOM

Dec. 10—Facing the prospect of almost certain defeat in Parliament, Prime Minister Theresa May postpones a vote on her unpopular compromise agreement to withdraw from the EU by a March deadline. May says she will try to extract further concessions, but EU officials have said they have no intention of renegotiating any of the key terms. May Dec. 12 survives a vote of no confidence brought by disgruntled members of her Conservative Party.

### YEMEN

Dec. 13—Representatives of the Saudi-backed government and Houthi rebel forces, meeting for the 1st time in 2 years in Stockholm, Sweden, reach an agreement brokered by the UN to start a cease-fire in the Houthi-controlled port city of Hodeidah. Both sides promise to withdraw forces from the area, allowing the UN to use the port for delivering humanitarian aid. The 4-year-old civil war has put 14 million at risk of starvation. ■