

February 2019

INTERNATIONAL

Arms Control

Feb. 1—The Trump administration announces that the US is withdrawing from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, a 1987 US-Soviet pact. Russia announces the next day that it, too, is suspending participation in the treaty, which will terminate in 6 months unless the 2 sides agree to renew it. US officials have accused Russia of violating the treaty by developing a new cruise missile capable of reaching targets in Europe.

Indian Subcontinent

Feb. 14—A suicide car bomber rams a convoy and kills at least 40 paramilitary officers in Indian-controlled Kashmir, the deadliest attack in the contested region in 3 decades. Jaish-e-Muhammad, an Islamist militant group based in Pakistan, claims responsibility. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi blames Pakistan and vows that the perpetrators will “pay a very heavy price.”

Feb. 26—Indian warplanes attack an alleged Jaish-e-Muhammad training camp in northern Pakistan. Pakistan claims it shot down 2 of the intruding jets; Indian officials confirm that an Indian pilot is in Pakistani custody. It is the 1st such cross-border air strike since their 1971 war.

Feb. 28—Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, seeking to deescalate the crisis, says the captured Indian pilot will be released the next day. He warns of the dangers of “miscalculation” when both sides have nuclear weapons.

Korean Peninsula

Feb. 27—US President Donald Trump and North Korean ruler Kim Jong-un meet in Hanoi, Vietnam, for their 2nd summit meeting in less than a year. The talks abruptly end Feb. 28 with no agreement. Trump says Kim made an unacceptable demand that all US sanctions be lifted in return for North Korea dismantling a key nuclear facility but retaining other elements of its weapons program. North Korea says it asked for a partial lifting of sanctions in exchange for extending a freeze on testing.

CHINA

Feb. 4—International human rights organizations call on the United Nations to investigate mass imprisonment of members of the Uighur ethnic group in Xinjiang province in western China. As many as 1 million Muslim Uighurs have been sent to reeducation camps allegedly designed to eradicate their heritage. China claims the sites are vocational training facilities.

EL SALVADOR

Feb. 3—Nayib Bukele, 37, a former mayor of San Salvador and leader of the center-right Grand Alliance for National Unity, wins the presidency in the 1st round of voting with 54% of the vote. The candidates for the 2 parties that had traded power for the past 30 years were far behind, with the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance taking 32% and the leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front just 14%. Bukele campaigned on an anticorruption platform; the country has been plagued by organized crime.

IRAN

Feb. 13—A suicide car bomber kills at least 27 members of the Revolutionary Guard paramilitary force in an attack on a convoy in southeast Iran, 2 days after official commemorations of the Islamic revolution's 40th anniversary.

Feb. 19—After initially blaming the US, Iranian officials say the attack was carried out by 3 Pakistanis. Iran has long accused Pakistan of harboring Sunni militants and separatists from its southeastern Sistan and Baluchistan province.

NIGERIA

Feb. 27—The national electoral commission announces that incumbent Muhammadu Buhari easily won a Feb. 23 presidential election with 56% of the vote. The election had been abruptly postponed a week earlier, hours before polls were originally scheduled to open, reportedly because of ballot distribution problems. Less than 36% of voters turn out for the rescheduled contest, and at least 39 are killed in election-day violence. After the results are released, runner-up Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party calls the election a “sham” and vows to mount a legal challenge.

SPAIN

Feb. 12—The trial of 12 Catalan leaders on charges of rebellion, sedition, and other charges, in connection with an October 2017 independence referendum in the northeastern region of Catalonia, opens in a Madrid court. The defendants include former regional officials and civil society leaders.

Feb. 15—Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez calls a general election for April 28, less than a year after his Socialist party managed to form a government though it held less than a quarter of the seats in parliament. Spain's 3rd national election in less than 4 years is precipitated by a parliamentary defeat of the Sánchez government's proposed budget.

SUDAN

Feb. 22—Unable to quell protests that began in December, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who has held power since leading a 1989 coup, declares a yearlong state of emergency and dissolves the government. He also says he is shelving plans for a constitutional amendment that would allow him to run for a 3rd term when his current term ends in 2020. Under the state of emergency, state governors are replaced by military officers and unlicensed protests are banned.

SYRIA

Feb. 22—Trump administration officials now say the US will leave about 400 soldiers in eastern Syria, backtracking from Trump's own December announcement that he was ordering the immediate withdrawal of all 2,000 US troops deployed in the country. Britain and France reportedly had threatened to withdraw their forces from Syria also unless the US retained a military presence there to continue supporting Kurdish-led militia operations against the Islamic State.

VENEZUELA

Feb. 4—European Union member states join the US, Canada, and most Latin American countries in recognizing opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the nation's legitimate interim president, citing the allegedly rigged 2018 reelection of incumbent Nicolás Maduro and his rejection of their demand that he call a new election.

Feb. 23—Amid violent clashes with protesters, pro-government forces block an attempt led by Guaidó to deliver humanitarian aid (mostly from the US) across the Colombian and Brazilian borders to Venezuelans suffering from hyperinflation and shortages of food and medicine. ■