

## March 2019

## INTERNATIONAL

**China-Europe Relations**

March 12—The European Commission, the EU's executive body, issues a report calling China "an economic competitor" and a "systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance." The warning reflects concerns over rising Chinese influence in Europe. More than a dozen EU member states have agreed to host Chinese infrastructure investments as part of the globe-spanning Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

March 23—Chinese President Xi Jinping joins Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte at a signing ceremony in Rome for a memorandum of understanding on a framework for Italy's participation in the BRI. Italy, mired in a recession, becomes the largest Western nation to sign on, ignoring cautions from the EU and the US. The deal calls for cooperation across a range of sectors and gives a state-owned Chinese company a role in managing ports in Genoa and Trieste.

**AFGHANISTAN**

March 12—Peace talks in Doha, Qatar, between US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and representatives of the Taliban end after more than 2 weeks without a deal. However, both sides say they made progress and plan to meet again. The discussions have focused on the timeline for a US troop withdrawal, predicated on a Taliban pledge not to harbor terrorist groups that would use the country as a base for international operations. Meanwhile, fighting continues. The Taliban March 11 killed or captured an entire unit of more than 50 Afghan soldiers in an attack on an army base in the northwest.

**ALGERIA**

March 11—President Abdelaziz Bouteflika issues a statement that he is dropping his bid for a 5th term and will leave office before the end of April, ending a 20-year authoritarian reign. An announcement that he would run for reelection had provoked massive street protests in recent weeks. Bouteflika, 82, has not spoken in public since suffering a stroke in 2013 that left him paralyzed, and is seen as a figurehead for other elites ruling behind the scenes. The protests continue, demanding the ouster of his entire regime.

March 26—Army Chief of Staff Ahmed Gaid Salah says Bouteflika should be declared unfit and removed from office.

**BRAZIL**

March 12—Two former police officers are arrested on charges of assassinating Marielle Franco, a Rio de Janeiro councilwoman and prominent Afro-Brazilian gay rights activist, in March 2018. Her supporters believe she was targeted because of her human rights advocacy and criticism of police brutality.

March 21—Former President Michel Temer is arrested on charges of taking bribes in a sprawling corruption scandal involving the state-owned oil company Petrobras. It has already resulted in the conviction of 1 other former president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and other business and political leaders.

**ISRAEL**

March 25—With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side in the White House, US President Donald Trump signs a proclamation recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The move, which reverses decades of US policy, is seen as timed to boost Netanyahu's prospects in Israeli elections in April.

**KAZAKHSTAN**

March 19—Nursultan Nazarbayev, 78, announces his resignation as president after 30 years of authoritarian rule. However, he will retain influential positions as head of the ruling party and chairman of the national security council. The speaker of the upper house of parliament, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, is named acting president. Nazarbayev has led Kazakhstan since 1989, when it was still part of the Soviet Union.

**MOZAMBIQUE**

March 14—Cyclone Idai floods vast stretches of the country, killing hundreds and cutting off hundreds of thousands of others. The port city of Beira is devastated, and the death toll is expected to rise. The cyclone also hits neighboring Malawi and Zimbabwe.

**NEW ZEALAND**

March 14—A gunman espousing white nationalist views attacks 2 mosques in Christchurch, killing 50 worshippers with a semi-automatic assault rifle and posting a live video of the attacks on Facebook. He is arrested at the scene and charged with murder the next day.

March 20—Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces that the government will move quickly to pass legislation banning military-style semiautomatic weapons, assault rifles, and associated ammunition magazines and parts. She says the government will buy back such weapons already in the hands of the public, following a model instituted by Australia after a mass shooting in 1996.

**SLOVAKIA**

March 30—Zuzana Caputova, a pro-Western liberal lawyer, wins a presidential election with 58% of the vote in a runoff against the populist ruling party's candidate, and will be the nation's 1st female president. She entered the race after joining protests against the February 2018 murders of journalist Jan Kuciak, who had investigated political corruption, and his fiancée.

**THAILAND**

March 24—The country holds its first general election since a 2014 coup installed a military junta.

March 27—An opposition coalition led by the Pheu Thai Party, whose government was ousted in the 2014 coup, says it has won a majority in the lower house of parliament, though official results will not be released until May. But a party loyal to Prayuth Chan-ocha, the head of the junta, also claims victory.

**TURKEY**

March 31—In local elections held nationwide, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) appears to lose control of Ankara and Istanbul, suffering its heaviest electoral setback to date despite his frenetic campaigning. The AKP challenges the results in both cities, claiming irregularities.

**UNITED KINGDOM**

March 29—On the day Britain was supposed to leave the EU, Parliament for the 3rd time rejects the exit agreement negotiated by Prime Minister Theresa May, despite her promise to leave office if her Conservative Party backed it. The EU has extended the deadline to April 12, but both sides have intensified preparations for the possibility of a chaotic exit with no deal in place. ■