

September 2019

AFGHANISTAN

Sept. 7—US President Donald Trump says he was about to meet with representatives of the Taliban at the presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland, to complete a peace agreement that would allow for the departure of US troops from Afghanistan. But he calls off the previously secret meeting and scraps further talks after a bombing in Kabul claimed by the Taliban kills a dozen people including a US soldier.

Sept. 28—Taliban threats and attacks fail to stop a presidential election, but turnout is down by half from 2014. Final results are not due until November. The incumbent, Ashraf Ghani, faces the government's chief executive, Abdullah Abdullah, in a rematch of the 2014 election, which ended with no clear victor and was finally resolved with a power-sharing deal.

AUSTRIA

Sept. 29—The conservative People's Party, headed by former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, finishes 1st in parliamentary elections with 37% of the vote, a 6-point increase from the previous election in 2017. Kurz's government was ousted by a vote of no confidence in May, amid a corruption scandal involving the far-right Freedom Party—whose share of the vote falls to 16%, from 26% in 2017. Kurz is expected to explore a range of possible coalitions, including a reprise of the previous one, or another involving the resurgent Green Party.

EGYPT

Sept. 23—Lawyers and human rights activists assert that about 500 people have been arrested by security forces cracking down on a rare outbreak of public opposition to the autocratic rule of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Small protests broke out Sept. 20 in Cairo and other cities in response to videos posted online by Mohamed Ali, an Egyptian businessman living in self-imposed exile in Spain, accusing Sisi and his regime of corruption.

EL SALVADOR

Sept. 6—President Nayib Bukele announces that he is forming an international commission to investigate corruption. The launch of the independent panel, backed by the Organization of American States, comes less than a week after a similar UN-backed commission is shut down in Guatemala; it drew the ire of President Jimmy Morales by investigating him and his family for corruption. Bukele won a February election on a platform of rooting out corruption, though recent news reports have linked him to Venezuelan money laundering.

ISRAEL

Sept. 17—In a do-over of an April election that ended in an impasse, neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of the right-wing Likud Party, nor Benny Gantz, a centrist former army chief of staff and head of the Blue and White party, wins enough seats in the Knesset to form a majority. Likud takes 32 of the 120 seats in the Knesset, 1 less than Blue and White.

Sept. 25—After talks on forming a unity government fail, President Reuven Rivlin announces that he will give Netanyahu up to 6 weeks to form a governing coalition, since Likud has a slight lead in pledges of support from other parties.

PERU

Sept. 30—President Martín Vizcarra exercises seldom-used executive authority to dissolve the opposition-controlled legislature

and call elections. Lawmakers respond by voting to suspend Vizcarra. The opposition is headed by the right-wing Popular Force party, whose leader Keiko Fujimori is in jail awaiting trial on corruption charges.

RUSSIA

Sept. 8—In local elections, President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party and its allies lose 1/3 of their seats in Moscow's city assembly but still hold 25 of the 45 seats. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny calls the result a victory due to a voting strategy whereby liberals cast votes for the Communist Party, which wins 13 seats. Election officials had barred most liberal candidates from running, setting off mass protests. However, just 22% of eligible voters in Moscow turn out to cast ballots, and United Russia's gubernatorial candidates prevail in most other parts of the country.

SAUDI ARABIA

Sept. 14—Missiles and drones strike 2 major oil installations, setting them ablaze and temporarily cutting Saudi oil production by more than 50%. Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, more than 500 miles from the targets, claim credit for the attack—they have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition for 4 years. But Saudi officials immediately blame Iran.

Sept. 16—Trump says the evidence appears to suggest that Iran was involved in the attack but declines to definitively assign blame. He says he would prefer to avoid war with Iran over the incident, which follows months of rising tensions since Trump tightened sanctions on Iran.

SOUTH AFRICA

Sept. 1—A wave of violent unrest against immigrant workers and foreign-owned shops begins in Johannesburg and lasts for several days, leading to at least 12 deaths. Several African nations whose citizens were attacked recall their ambassadors in protest, including Nigeria, which also pulls out of a Cape Town conference on implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement. Nigeria announces Sept. 9 that it will evacuate 100s of its citizens from South Africa, which has seen recurring incidents of violent xenophobia in recent years.

UNITED STATES

Sept. 24—Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the US House of Representatives announces a formal impeachment inquiry into allegations that Trump violated the Constitution by pushing the Ukrainian government to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden, a leading candidate for the Democratic nomination to challenge Trump in the 2020 presidential election. Pelosi says Congress will probe a whistleblower's report that Trump, in a July 25 phone call, pressured President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate claims that Biden and his son Hunter engaged in corruption in Ukraine. Days earlier, the Trump administration had frozen \$391 million in previously authorized US military aid for Ukraine, which is fighting Russia-backed separatist rebels.

ZIMBABWE

Sept. 6—Robert Mugabe, a leader of the struggle against white-minority rule in the former British colony of Rhodesia who became Zimbabwe's 1st president, dies in a Singapore hospital at the age of 95. He was ousted by the army in November 2017 after 4 decades of increasingly autocratic rule that left the country in economic collapse. ■