December 2010

INTERNATIONAL

Climate change

Dec. 11—At the close of an international climate conference in Cancún, Mexico, participating nations agree to establish a new fund that will assist less-developed nations in adapting to climate change, to transfer clean-energy technologies through new mechanisms, and to provide compensation for the preservation of forests. Although the agreement is modest in scope, it is seen as reviving the international process for addressing manmade global warming, a process that was feared dead after a climate conference a year earlier in Copenhagen.

Energy

Dec. 11—In Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, India's energy minister and the leaders of Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan reach preliminary agreement on establishing a natural gas pipeline that would carry Turkmen fuel to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan. The plan is supported by the US, which hopes the pipeline could contribute to economic development in Afghanistan and improve relations between India and Pakistan. The proposed project faces hurdles related to financing and security.

Nuclear proliferation

Dec. 3—The International Atomic Energy Agency votes to establish a worldwide mechanism that will provide fuel for nuclear reactors to nations that wish to develop a nuclear power capacity, obviating the need for such countries to produce the fuel themselves. The fund, which is to receive $50 million in support from US investor Warren Buffett, is intended to brake the proliferation of nuclear weapons capacities.

AFGHANISTAN

Dec. 15—The administration of US President Barack Obama releases a year-end review of American strategy for the war in Afghanistan. The review reports that NATO forces in the country have registered military gains over the past year but that those gains are fragile. The fragility stems partly from Taliban insurgents' continued ability to find safe havens in Pakistan from which to carry out operations in Afghanistan. The US envisions stepping up attacks on Taliban and Al Qaeda members within Pakistan, largely through drone strikes.

BELARUS

Dec. 19—In a presidential election universally regarded as fraudulent, President Aleksandr Lukashenko according to official returns wins another term in office with about 80% of the vote. At the behest of opposition leaders, thousands of protesters converge after the announcement in the capital, Minsk. Security forces disperse the crowds, beating many protesters. By the end of the next day, at least 6 of the 9 individuals who challenged Lukashenko in the election have been arrested. Western governments, toward which Belarus has recently made some effort to draw closer, respond to the regime's suppression of dissent by issuing harsh statements.

CHINA

Dec. 11—The government reports that China's consumer prices in November rose by 5.1% over the same month a year earlier, representing the fastest rate of inflation in more than 2 years. The previous day, as part of an effort to limit inflation and contain growth, Beijing had for the 6th time in a year increased reserve-ratio requirements for state-run banks.

Dec. 25—The People's Bank of China increases interest rates for the 2nd time in 2 months, raising the 1-year benchmark lending rate by 25 basis points. The government is attempting to rein in growth and inflation in part because, during the global financial crisis, a large amount of liquidity was injected into the Chinese economy.

EGYPT

Dec. 1—Three days after a 1st round of parliamentary elections that was widely viewed as corrupt, Egypt's 2 most prominent opposition movements withdraw from further rounds of voting. The Muslim Brotherhood, the larger of the 2 movements, had controlled 1/5 of the seats in parliament before the recent election, but according to official results won no seats at all in the new voting.

HAITI

Dec. 7—Haiti's electoral board announces that, following 1st-round presidential voting on Nov. 28, 2 candidates have qualified for a run-off election on Jan. 16. The 2 are the governing party's candidate, Jude Célestin, and a former 1st lady, Mirlande Manigat. Not qualifying for the run-off according to the official tally is Michel Martelly, a singer with a large, enthusiastic following. The board's announcement sparks widespread unrest that largely shuts down the country and causes UN peacekeepers to dispense tear gas and fire on crowds with rubber bullets.

Dec. 9—The nation's electoral board promises to review the presidential election results. Later, additional announcements regarding the voting's outcome are delayed until after the Organization of American States reviews the voting. No timetable for the review process is fixed, and the main candidates do not promise to respect the outcome.

IRAN

Dec. 29—Moshe Yaalon, Israel's minister of strategic affairs, says in public comments that Iran, due to difficulties recently experienced within that country's nuclear program, will not be able to produce a nuclear weapon for at least 3 years. This represents a lengthening of Israel's expected timeline for Iran's nuclearization, which in the past had stood at between 1 and 3 years. Iran's nuclear program has recently struggled because of a destructive computer worm and the bombing death of a prominent nuclear scientist.

IRAQ

Dec. 21—Nine months after Iraq conducted parliamentary elections, the country's legislative body approves a new government headed by Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, the prime minister under the previous government. The 9 months of uncertainty had at times called into question Iraq's ability to survive as a democratic state. The new government is viewed as fragile.

Dec. 23—According to a widely cited website, Iraq Body Count, fewer Iraqi civilians have died as a result of violence in 2010 than in any other year since the US led an invasion of the country in 2003. The site reports that 3,976 civilians have died to this point in the year, compared with 4,680 in all of 2009 and more than 25,000 in 2006.

ITALY

Dec. 14—Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi survives 2 confidence votes in the country's parliament but is nonetheless widely believed to lack a workable governing majority, raising the possibility of early elections. Meanwhile, amid protests by anarchists in Rome, almost 100 people are wounded in clashes with police. International markets, concerned about Italy's ability to address its large government debt in an atmosphere of political uncertainty, watch events closely.

IVORY COAST

Dec. 2—After a Nov. 28 run-off presidential election pitting incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo against challenger Alassane Ouattara, a former prime minister, the nation's top electoral official deems Ouattara the winner by virtue of his having won 54% of the vote to Gbagbo's 45%. Gbagbo rejects the result, alleging fraud in sections of the country, though over coming days the UN and many individual nations recognize Ouattara's victory.

Dec. 4—The 2 candidates hold competing inaugurations. The African Union, the European Union, and Washington begin to exert strong pressure on Gbagbo to step aside, but he refuses.

Dec. 16—Security forces in the capital open fire on people demonstrating in support of Ouattara. According to a local human rights group, at least 15 are killed. By month's end, with Gbagbo still refusing to step aside, concerns increase that Ivory Coast, which experienced a civil war in the century's 1st decade, may descend into widespread violence again.

JAPAN

Dec. 17—Japan announces a new set of National Defense Program Guidelines according to which the country will shift its defensive emphasis away from the northern island Hokkaido, and the cold war–era threat posed by the erstwhile Soviet Union, to the southern region of Okinawa, where China's navy increasingly operates. The report, which envisions enhancing Japan's submarine capabilities and reducing its tank forces, calls China's military modernization "a matter of concern for the region and the international community."

KOREA, SOUTH

Dec. 3—Kim Kwan-jin, South Korea's defense minister–designate, says that if North Korea carries out further attacks against the south like November's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, Seoul will respond with airstrikes so that Pyongyang "doesn't even dare

FROM THE ARCHIVES

What Current History *authors were saying . . .*

5 years ago

Keenly aware of Washington's disengagement and disinterest in Latin America, Beijing has sought to fill the void. In some cases, such as most of South America, the Chinese interest has been chiefly in commodities and raw materials, like copper from Chile and Peru. . . . For Mexico and Central America, however, China has become a fierce competitor in markets for goods manufactured by cheap labor, often drawing capital and investment away from the region. China's impact is mixed, and its role in Latin America's future is not altogether clear.

MICHAEL SHIFTER AND
VINAY JAWAHAR
The Divided States of the Americas
February 2006

10 years ago

Hugo Chávez has continued to define his revolution while mystifying observers with his behavior and rhetoric. Nevertheless, at the close of his second year in office, Chávez's revolution is beginning to take rough shape. The new Venezuela, with its vague Bolivarian ideology of nationalism, integrity, and strong leadership, is characterized by a concentration of powers in the person of the president, a conquest of institutions that had represented the political and socioeconomic elite, the empowering of the masses through popular consultation, and a new third worldism that challenges the dominant West, particularly the United States.

JENNIFER MCCOY AND
LAURA NEUMAN
Defining the "Bolivarian Revolution": Hugo Chávez's Venezuela
February 2001

think about it again." The South Korean government of President Lee Myung-bak has faced harsh domestic criticism for what was perceived as a weak response to the shelling.

Dec. 5—The south begins live-fire artillery drills near the 2 countries' maritime border. Two weeks later, South Korea undertakes artillery drills near Yeonpyeong Island. The north, despite having made dire warnings about reprisals for such drills, does not react militarily.

Russia

Dec. 27—Former tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, serving a prison term that was to have ended in 2011 stemming from a 2005 conviction on tax-fraud charges, is convicted of embezzlement and 3 days later sentenced to an additional 6 years' confinement. Although Khodorkovsky is widely believed to have engaged in questionable business practices when he controlled the energy giant Yukos, the prosecutions are thought to be motivated by his having politically challenged Vladimir Putin, the country's current prime minister and former president. Critics of the Kremlin decry the new conviction as evidence that Russia is making little progress toward establishing rule of law in the country.

United States

Dec. 3—The Labor Department announces that the US economy gained only 39,000 jobs in November, fewer than needed to accommodate new workers entering the workforce and far fewer than needed to reduce the country's unemployment rate, which rose to 9.8% from 9.6% a month earlier.

Dec. 16—Following earlier Senate approval, the House of Representatives passes an $801 billion tax-cut package and sends it to Obama for his signature. The tax cuts are significant because they will provide continued fiscal stimulus to an economy still not fully recovered from the after-effects of the 2008–2009 financial crisis, and because they represent a compromise between Obama and congressional Republicans, who beginning in January will control the House.

Dec. 22—The Senate ratifies a treaty with Russia known as New Start. The treaty will in time limit both the US and Russia to 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads and 700 launchers. New Start also reestablishes a verification regime between the 2 countries, which had been operating without such a regime since the 2009 expiration of the 1st Start treaty. The Senate's ratification of the treaty had been in doubt until virtually the last minute.

Venezuela

Dec. 17—The country's National Assembly grants to President Hugo Chávez the power for 18 months to enact laws by decree. The president has been granted decree powers numerous times in the past, but this instance is especially significant because the action is taken shortly before a new congress, which will have a larger opposition presence, is scheduled to take office. Also in the closing days of its session the legislature approves a law providing penalties for engaging in political dissent online, and another that prohibits parties and nongovernmental organizations from accepting money from outside the country. ■