

GREAT DECISIONS 2019 FALL UPDATE

The UPDATES are a free supplement to the Great Decisions Program. Each update covers five topics from the 2019 Great Decisions and provides important news, quotes, and readings to keep you informed on the latest in foreign policy.

Nuclear Negotiations

On June 30, 2019, President Trump became the first sitting U.S. President to cross the demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea. President Trump with North Korea leader Kim Jong-un to continue their discussions regarding the North's nuclear weapons program. This was the third meeting between the two leaders and lasted for a little under an hour. While the meeting was historic due to the crossing of the DMZ, no progress was made regarding any nuclear agreement between the U.S. and North Korea. Despite no deal, both Kim Jong-un and President Trump hailed the meeting as a success. "We want to bring an end to our unpleasant past and bring in a new future, so this is a very courageous and determined act," Kim said. "This handshake of peace itself serves to demonstrate that today is different from yesterday."

The first meeting between the two leaders took place on June 12, 2018, in Singapore, and was historic mainly because it was the first meeting between the leaders of the two nations. The meeting led to an agreement that established guidelines for the U.S. and North Korea to work toward a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. The second meeting was on February 2019 in Hanoi, Vietnam, where President Trump walked out of negotiations after the two leaders were unable to reach an agreement. This came on the heels of North Korea demanding that all the U.S. sanctions be lifted in as a condition for North Korea to denuclearize some of their nuclear program. "Basically, they wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety and we couldn't do that...[T]hey were willing to denuke a large portion of the areas that we wanted, but we couldn't give up all of the sanctions for that," Trump stated in a post-meeting press conference.

Trump and Kim's relationship that began with squabbling and name calling when Trump first took office has evolved. Trump went from trading barbs such as "Rocket Man" about Kim and threats of "Fire and Fury" to flattering Kim before both the Hanoi summit and the latest DMZ meeting. Trump claimed in March to have ordered the withdrawal of planned additional sanctions on North Korea. President Trump also promised to end the U.S. military exercises with South Korea after the Singapore meeting, but they are still scheduled to take place in August.

Recommended Readings

Eli Meixler, "President Trump and Kim Jong Un Just Agreed to Work Toward Denuclearization," Time (June 12, 2018). <https://time.com/5309425/donald-trump-kim-jong-un-summit-document-full-text/>

Everett Rosenfeld, "Trump-Kim summit was cut short after North Korea demanded an end to sanctions," CNBC (February 28, 2019). <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/28/white-house-trump-kim-meetings-change-of-schedule.html>

Yonette Joseph, "4 Takeaways from the Trump-Kim Meeting at the DMZ," New York Times (June 30, 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/30/world/asia/trump-kim-north-korea-meeting.html>

Rise of Populism in Europe

On July 16, 2019, the European Parliament announced that it had elected Ursula von der Leyen to be the next president of the European Commission. Von der Leyen will take command of the executive branch of the European Union, becoming the first woman to do so. Voted in by a slight majority of 383 votes out of 733, Von der Leyen is now tasked with restoring faith in the "European Project" that has been beset on all sides, whether by the rise of nationalist parties in Eastern Europe, or the approaching reality of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, dubbed Brexit. Von der Leyen is cut from a similar cloth as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, having been deputy minister of the German Christian Democratic Union Party (led by Merkel for many years) and Minister of Defense since 2013.

Von der Leyen's first matter of business is the negotiations regarding the UK's withdrawal from the EU, which began after the referendum on June 23, 2016. Theresa May stepped down as prime minister on May 24, 2019, after failing three times to reach a consensus in Parliament on her Brexit proposals. She has been replaced by former Mayor of London and Brexit supporter Boris Johnson. Johnson took office on July 24 and has begun by claiming he will scrap May's Brexit plan and begin his own process, which includes the possibility of a "no deal" Brexit. The latest deadline for a Brexit deal is October 31, 2019. Von der Leyen has said that she would use the deal negotiated by Theresa May as the basis for any Brexit agreement. "We don't want a hard Brexit, it's a bad outcome for both sides," Von der Leyen said.

While Europe has seen rising divisions, Germany has managed to remain steadfast in the face of opposition, with the center-right Christian Democratic Union remaining in control of the Bundestag. With the German government preparing for the end of Angela Merkel's term as Chancellor, the CDU and the EU will lose a great champion for a united Europe. Merkel stepped down as CDU party chair and was replaced by Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who also replaced Von der Leyen as Germany's Defense Minister. Kramp-Karrenbauer is the favorite to replace Angela Merkel as Chancellor when she steps down in 2021 and represents a slight shift toward a more conservative leader. Kramp-Karrenbauer has been vocal about her frustrations regarding Brexit and how she hopes for a second referendum in Britain. Von der Leyen, Kramp-Karrenbauer and Johnson will now be responsible for setting the course for the future of Europe.

Recommended Readings

Rick Noack, "With all eyes on Boris Johnson, Germany quietly swears in a possible rival," Washington Post (July 24, 2019). https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/07/24/with-all-eyes-boris-johnson-germany-quietly-swears-possible-rival/?utm_term=.ad0701233f06

Matina Stevis-Gridneff, "Ursula von der Leyen, First Woman Chosen for Top E.U. Job, Wins Confirmation," The New York Times (July 16, 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/16/world/europe/ursula-von-der-leyen-eu-president.html>

Max Colchester and Lawrence Norman, "'I Don't Know What He Will Do': Europe Braces for Brexit with Boris Johnson," The Wall Street Journal (July 22, 2019). <https://www.wsj.com/articles/i-dont-know-what-he-will-do-europe-braces-for-brexit-with-boris-johnson-11563825742>

Refugees and Global Migration

On July 1, President Donald Trump signed a bipartisan funding bill to provide \$4.6 billion to federal agencies along the U.S.-Mexico border. The bill was passed after U.S. Customs and Border patrol claimed that they would run out of funding for housing many of the migrants that are detained along the border. The U.S. government's inability to house and handle large groups of migrants (including women and children) has been a source of controversy. The funding bill was signed after months of cantankerous debate in Congress. The major source of controversy involves the housing of children. While the issue of family separation has captured the media, there is also an unprecedented number of unaccompanied minors attempting to cross the border.

Controversy surrounds the facilities that house many of these migrants. Many are overcrowded, with unsanitary conditions throughout. Children have been left isolated and are put through a separate migration process than adults, raising questions about whether these facilities have the appropriate conditions to harbor children. The emergency funding bill followed a U.S. District Judge ruling that the detention centers along the border do not meet the standard of the president set in the "Flores Settlement Agreement." The Flores Agreement set what the responsibilities the U.S. has regarding the well-being of children held in migrant detention. The agreement calls for access to showers, hot food and "sanitary and safe conditions," all of which the District Court has found lacking in these facilities.

While Congress and the White House continue to debate the solution, the issue of migration along the border continues to worsen. Many migrants will continue to flee impoverished and violent regions of Latin America, in search of a better life in the U.S.

President Trump revealed his new campaign slogan for 2020 as "Finish the Wall," a take on his original 2016 slogan of "Build the Wall," referring to President Trump's plan to build a secure border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. While Trump has managed to secure some funding for border wall construction projects, he has fallen short of his promise that the wall be funded,

in full, by the Mexican government. As of July 2019, 205 miles of the proposed wall have been completed.

Recommended Readings

Dara Lind, "The border is in crisis. Here's how it got this bad," Vox (Jun 5, 2019)
<https://www.vox.com/2019/4/11/18290677/border-immigration-illegal-asylum-central-america-mexico-trump>

Christal Hayes, "Children come first: House passes \$4.6 billion in aid for migrants at border after Pelosi caves to Republicans," USA Today (June 27, 2019)
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/06/27/house-passes-4-6-billion-aid-migrants-after-pelosi-caves-republicans/1587320001/>

Anna Giaritelli, "Trump has not built a single mile of new border fence after 30 months in office" Washington Examiner (July 20, 2019)
<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/trump-has-not-built-a-single-mile-of-new-border-fence-after-30-months-in-office>

Trade with China

Following another round of negotiations, the United States and China continue to look to resolve their growing divide over tariffs and trade. The latest talks took place on July 30 and featured discussion over the purchase of American farm goods like soybeans. The meeting, which took place in Shanghai, was mediated by U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. While both sides have shown a willingness to end the trade "war" and come to a new agreement, they have so far been unable to come to a consensus that drops the current tariffs.

The meeting in Shanghai was organized by President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the G-20 summit in June. The G-20 summit in Osaka, Japan, was the first meeting the two leaders had since failed negotiations in May lead to a \$200 billion hike on Chinese goods coming into the U.S. The U.S. Commerce Department also put Chinese Telecommunication company, Huawei, on the national security blacklist, meaning that American companies cannot do business legally with them. Since June, the U.S. Commerce Department has added four more Chinese companies, all focused in the development of computer technology, to the blacklist.

The U.S. and China's conflict over trade has begun to spread to Canada, where the country is embroiled in a political battle over the arrest of Huawei's chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou. Meng was arrested last December in Canada, and has been held under house arrest at her home in Vancouver, Canada, since. She has continued to battle extradition to the U.S. where charges of bank and wire fraud against Meng are pending. In response, the Chinese government announced they had detained two Canadian diplomats for alleged spying. In total, 13 Canadian citizens have been detained in China for a multitude of reasons since Meng's arrest in December. Canadian government officials have appealed for calm, saying that many of these

Canadians are out on bail or serving probation. This number has remained relatively stable. There has not been a marked increase or decrease in recent years.

With President Trump threatening a new round of tariffs on Chinese goods coming to the U.S., the end of the U.S.-China trade war still seems a long way off. China has retaliated with their own tariff increases on mostly agricultural U.S. exports. While early July showed promise with the Trump administration relaxing some of the tariffs, neither Trump or Xi appear ready to back down.

Recommended Readings

Dorcas Wong and Alexander Chipman Koty, "The US-China Trade War: A Timeline," China Briefing (July 31, 2019). <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/the-us-china-trade-war-a-timeline/>

Salama and Alex Leary, "Trump Ties Trade Deal to China Action in Hong Kong, Suggests Meeting with Xi," The Wall Street Journal (August 14, 2019). <https://www.wsj.com/articles/washington-offers-conflicting-messages-on-hong-kong-unrest-amid-u-s-china-trade-talks-11565802045?mod=searchresults&page=6&pos=18>

Jun Mai, "China accuse Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor of stealing state secrets," South China Morning Post (March 4, 2019). <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2188582/china-accuses-canadians-michael-kovrig-and-michael-spavor>

State of the State Department

On June 20, 2019, a U.S. military drone was shot down over the Strait of Hormuz by Iran's Revolutionary Guard, which claims that the drone had violated Iranian airspace. The drone attack followed weeks of provocation from both the Iranian government and the Trump administration, which had proposed earlier that week to add some 1,000 troops and resources to the Middle East to counter Iran's "hostile behavior." President Trump has had a hardline stance about Iran, pulling the U.S. out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and imposing new sanctions against Iran.

Iran has responded by arresting 17 Iranians that the government claims are spies working for the Central Intelligence Agency. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has responded to the claims of captured spies by saying "I would take with a significant grain of salt any Iranian assertion about any actions that they've taken." Iranian officials claim that none of the 17, who allegedly had "sophisticated training," had succeeded in their sabotage missions. Their spying missions included collecting information at the facilities where they worked, carrying out technical and intelligence activities and transferring and installing monitoring devices

Secretary Pompeo has been one of the leading voices within the U.S. government calling for a ratcheting up of pressure on Iran. "We've implemented the strongest pressure campaign in

history against the Iranian regime and we are not done,” Pompeo said at the Christians United for Israel event in Washington, DC, on July 8. Pompeo and the U.S. have gone it alone when it comes to confronting Iran, with European allies that had signed the JCPOA refusing to go along with the sanctions. The UK is looking to assemble a group of other European nations to help protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf, a group that would not work alongside President Trump’s proposed U.S. taskforce that would patrol the region. Secretary Pompeo said that the UK is responsible for their own ships in the region after the capture of the British-flagged Stena Impero by Iranian forces. As of this update, the Stena Impero is still under Iranian control.

Recommended Readings

Quint Forgey, “Pompeo suggests Iran may be lying about arrests of CIA spies,” Politico (July 22, 2019). <https://www.politico.eu/article/pompeo-suggests-iran-may-be-lying-about-arrests-of-cia-spies/>

Patrick Wintour and Julian Borger, “UK must look after its own ships in the Gulf, says Pompeo,” The Guardian (July 22, 2019). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/22/uk-must-look-after-its-own-ships-in-the-gulf-says-pompeo>

Daniel Davis, “What It’s Like to Travel the World With the Secretary of State,” National Interest (August 8, 2019). <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/what-it%E2%80%99s-travel-world-secre-tary-state-72086>

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