

# GREAT DECISIONS

## *Spring 2019 Update*

**Refugees and Global Migration. Cybersecurity. The Rise of Populism in Europe. U.S.-China Trade. Middle East: Regional Disorder**

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### Refugees and Global Migration

According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency (CBP), more than 100,000 migrants were apprehended attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border during the month of March. This surge of migrants follows a February that was described as “the busiest February for border officials in the last 12 years,” with 76,000 migrants apprehended along the border.

“We’ve arrived at the breaking point,” Brian Hastings, chief of law enforcement operations for CBP said. This “breaking point” comes as the migrant caravan from Central America makes its way through Mexico toward the U.S. This caravan is made up of men, women and children, primarily from the Central American nations of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. All of these nations are currently experiencing economic hardships and violence, forcing families to flee.

As U.S. President Donald Trump and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador met in April to discuss the border dispute, many of President Trump’s decisions on handling the border were called into question. The U.S. State Department announced a plan to cut foreign aid to Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala—citizens from those three nations make up the largest percentage of migrants in the caravan. President Trump has backed up this plan, claiming that the three nations have done nothing to curb the number of migrants. This plan was criticized by both sides of the aisle in Congress, including Congressman Michael McCaul (R-TX) who said “If we cut all this funding, I think it’s going to make things tragically worse, not better.”

President Trump’s plan for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border continues to stall as the House of

Representatives filed suit on April 5. The lawsuit states that the President’s declaration of a National Emergency in March in order to secure funding for the border wall is unconstitutional, since there was no Congressional support for the President’s plan to appropriate funds from other agencies. “The President’s action clearly violates the Appropriations Clause by stealing from appropriated funds, an action that was not authorized by constitutional or statutory authority,” Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said. On April 9, the Defense Department announced that it will award nearly a billion dollars in contracts to different companies to begin the proposed border wall, with a completion date set at October 2020. The contract is also under dispute from State Attorney Generals and members of Congress, as the funds are being diverted from other sources.

### Recommended Readings

Jill Colvin, “President Trump Just Abandoned His Threat to Shut Down the U.S.-Mexico Border,” *Time* (April 5, 2019). <http://time.com/5564974/trump-no-border-shut-down/>

Claudio Escalon, “Hundreds in migrant caravan leave Honduras, beginning journey to U.S. southern border,” *USA Today* (April 10, 2019). <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/04/10/migrant-caravan-honduras-heading-u-s-southern-border-san-pedro-sula/3427004002/>

*The UPDATES take into account  
events up to April 22, 2019.*

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## Cyber Conflicts and Geopolitics

On March 22, Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller released his nearly 400-page report on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Delivered to Attorney General William Barr, the report contains Mueller's findings over years of investigation into possible ties between President Trump's presidential campaign and Russia. The attorney general publicly released a four-page summary of the report, though the entire document remains sealed.

In his summary to Congress, Barr quoted the Special Counsel, "while this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him." The Mueller Report has been widely anticipated and discussed throughout Trump's presidency.

While it had been proven that Russia did influence the election, it has remained unclear until Mueller's report whether or not the president or anyone on his campaign aided Russia.

Congress is pushing for the report to be released in its entirety, against Barr's decision to redact parts of the report when issuing it to them. Members of Congress believe they have a responsibility to "hold the president accountable any time he undermines the rule of law, and is not limited to his involvement with the Russian government during the campaign," according to Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. An April 1 letter from Democratic Congress members asked Barr for the unredacted report, with a subpoena being issued on April 20.

President Trump, who, according to Attorney Barr's summary of the report, expressed his support of the release of the unredacted report. "Let people see it," President Trump said. "There was no collusion. There was no obstruction. There was no nothing."

What does the Mueller Report mean for the future of American cybersecurity? In Europe, the European Union Parliament approved the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which became effective on May 25, 2018. It aims to protect EU data privacy and standardize data privacy laws in Europe. It applies to all organizations and companies that operate within the EU, or sell to or hold the information and personal data of EU residents.

The regulation aims to stop needless personal data harvesting, which means any information that could identify an individual person. Commonly this type of data is collected for digital marketing purposes; GDPR changes how companies can use and store consumers' data. Individuals now have more autonomy because companies are required to ask consent before

personal data is collected. Companies who do not adhere to the GDPR's new data collection standards will face heavy fines—"up to 4% of annual global turnover for breaching GDPR or 20 million euros," according to the GDPR website. In 2017 The Economist wrote that data had surpassed oil as the world's most valuable resource; how does GDPR affect data's prized status, and what can GDPR mean for the future of United States' data privacy laws?

### Recommended Readings

Sharon LaFraniere and Katie Benner, "Mueller Delivers Report on Trump- Russia Investigation to Attorney General," *The New York Times* (March 22, 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/22/us/politics/mueller-report.html>

Billy Perrigo, "The U.K. Mat Change the Rules That Turned Facebook into an Empire. Will Other Countries Follow?" *Time* (April 9, 2019). <http://time.com/5566501/facebook-regulation-zuckerberg/>

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## The Rise of Populism in Europe

On April 11, European Union leaders set a new deadline of October 31, 2019, for the end of Brexit negotiations. The original deadline for Brexit was March 29, 2019, but was pushed back to April 12 after British Prime Minister Theresa May was unable to find a consensus in Parliament for a withdrawal agreement. "The whole country is intensely frustrated that this process of leaving the European Union has not been completed," PM May said. Mrs. May has faced calls for her resignation after the failure to finalize a Brexit deal by the initial deadline. "The second extension in the space of a fortnight represents not only a diplomatic failure, but is another milestone in the government's mishandling of the entire Brexit process," Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, said. Despite the continued delays, Chancellor of the Exchequer Phillip Hammond believes that there will be a breakthrough in negotiations within the next few weeks. "We agree on the fundamentals," Hammond said at a meeting of the International Monetary Fund in Washington, D.C. Hammond went on to say that he believes that Mrs. May will remain as prime minister until a Brexit deal is reached.

The new deadline of October 31 means that the UK will now participate in the upcoming European Parliament election in late May unless parliament is able to reach a conclusion on Brexit before the start of the election on May 23. In preparation for the election, former UK Independence Party Leader Nigel Farage

announced the formation of a new “Brexit Party,” which will run for seats in the European election and seek an immediate implementation of Brexit. “Three years ago, we voted to leave the European Union,” Farage said at a rally in Britain, “We have been betrayed and the fightback begins today.”

The delay in the Brexit ruling came as a surprise to many in the European Union, who believed that the negotiations should end before the Parliament election. When discussing the initial deadline pushback from March 29, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker said that April 12 should be the final deadline for the approval of the Withdrawal Agreement “If it has not done so by then, no further short extension will be possible...or we risk jeopardizing the European Parliament elections.”

Some members within both the UK and EU Parliaments have called on May to hold a second referendum on Brexit. Scottish National Party leader Ian Blackford called on the PM to use the time before the new deadline to call for another vote. “As of today, there are 204 days until the new Brexit deadline... Will the prime minister now remove the ridiculous excuse that there isn’t enough time to hold a second referendum?” These ideas were echoed by European Council President Donald Tusk who said that any headway made on Brexit is up to the UK and that Mrs. May can use the time off to “cancel Brexit altogether.”

### Recommended Readings

Heather Stewart and Jessica Elgot, “May tells MPs ‘swift decisions’ on Brexit will be needed after recess,” *The Guardian* (April 11, 2019). <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/apr/11/brexit-may-insists-uk-can-still-exit-eu-by-end-of-next-month>

BBC, “Nigel Farage launches Brexit Party ahead of European elections,” (April 12, 2019). <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-47907350>

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## Decoding U.S-China Trade

The United States and China met from April 3 to April 5 to discuss trade issues such as agriculture, intellectual property and technology. U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin led the talks with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He in the White House. A month after the original deadline, the negotiations came after much speculation about a possible trade war and uncertainty about the future of trade with China.

Though significant progress has been made, the negotiations are not yet over. On April 4, the President said that the trade agreement would take at least four more weeks to complete. Several topics are still waiting to be negotiated as the tariffs cause repercussions for American sectors from agriculture to technology. While a speedier deal would protect American markets from further damage, the remaining issues are important for U.S. security and economic health.

“We’re talking intellectual property protection and theft. We’re talking about certain tariffs,” President Trump said. Chinese companies have transferred technology and intellectual property without the knowledge or permission of U.S. companies.

Other breakthroughs with China have been made recently. China has banned all variants of the opioid fentanyl, which had previously been exported, contributing to the overdose death epidemic in the United States. In 2018 Chinese President Xi Jinping had promised President Trump that China would ban the controlled substance. China also began buying American soybeans, which alleviated some farmers’ financial pressures due to the tariffs.

The United States has been enforcing tariffs on billions of dollars of Chinese goods since last year, which has incentivized China to negotiate with the United States. One of the goals of the United States is to write into the deal methods of enforcement to ensure that China follows and does not break the deal in the future. The enforcement structure would allow the United States to retaliate against China if it does not follow the agreement.

Many expected the president to announce a summit meeting with Chinese president Xi Jinping in order to complete the deal, but he instead opted to meet with Chinese and U.S. officials. President Trump said there could be a summit meeting between President Jinping and him if the countries reached a deal. The summit could take place at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, or in a third-party country, potentially to sign a completed trade agreement.

“I hope the two sides’ trade teams can continue working in the spirit of mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefit to resolve each other’s concerns, and finish negotiations on the text of the China-U.S. trade agreement soon,” Chinese President Xi Jinping said to Trump through Vice Premier Liu.

## Recommended Readings

John Feffer, “The Widening Rift Between the U.S. and China,” *The Nation*, (April 8, 2019). <https://www.thenation.com/article/china-us-xi-jinping-congagement/>

Jeff Mason and David Lawder, “Trump says U.S.-China trade deal may be reached in four weeks,” *Reuters* (April 4, 2019). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-china/trump-says-u-s-china-trade-deal-may-be-reached-in-four-weeks-idUSKCN1RG10X>

Ana Swanson, “Epic China Trade Deal Near Completion Trump says, but Haggling Continues,” *The New York Times* (April 4, 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/04/business/economy/trump-xi-china-trade-meeting.html>

## Middle East: Regional Disorder

Saudi Arabia has recently been developing a nuclear reactor near its capital city, Riyadh. Discovered through satellite images, the reactor is not yet fully developed and running. According to Saudi Arabia, the nuclear reactor is meant for research purposes, such as medical and scientific research and development. The reactor also is Saudi’s move away from dependence upon fossil fuel energy; the Saudi authorities say the country would like to develop and begin running upon nuclear power instead. The country plans to build at least one more reactor by the end of the decade.

Though the reactor is not large enough to be a nuclear power risk itself, its creation has caught the attention of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Saudi Arabia joined in 1988, the IAEA is able to inspect the country’s nuclear workings as it has agreed under the treaty to remain a non-weapons state. Yet the country is also a signatory of the Small Quantities Protocol since 2005, under which the original document exempted countries with small or no nuclear programs from inspections, which included Saudi Arabia. The country refused to agree to amended rules that added extra protections and inspections for such countries.

The IAEA has already begun to ask Saudi Arabia to agree to precautions to confirm their nuclear peacefulness. The reactor’s construction has produced worry about Saudi Arabia’s desire to develop nuclear weap-

onry. In March 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman warned that if Iran developed nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia would as well. The country has also refused to agree to standards that could curb nuclear weaponry development, such as on uranium enrichment and fuel reprocessing.

The United States approved these technological developments via authorizations by U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry. Allowing U.S. companies to sell nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia, these Part 810 authorizations have been kept secret since November 2017, despite similar authorizations being made public in the past. Several senators, such as Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Bob Menendez (D-NJ), have asked Perry to release the names of the companies and the contents of the authorizations. Perry attributed the secrecy to the companies’ wish to keep the information, which contains exclusive technologies, from the public.

Members of Congress were not made aware of the authorizations until this year. They are apprehensive of the United States’ relationship with Saudi Arabia, with senators like Elizabeth Warren openly questioning Perry’s decision to help Saudi Arabia develop nuclear technology after the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year. Representative Brad Sherman (D-CA) questioned the trustworthiness of the kingdom in regard to its involvement in the Khashoggi killing. When asked if any authorizations were approved after Khashoggi’s murder, Perry was unsure.

## Recommended Readings

Timothy Gardner, “U.S. senators seek details on nuclear power cooperation with Saudi Arabia,” *Reuters* (April 2, 2019). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-nuclearpower-senate/us-senators-seek-details-on-nuclear-power-cooperation-with-saudi-arabia-idUSKCN1RE230>

Sébastien Seibt, “Is Saudi Arabia on track to become a nuclear power?” *France24* (April 9, 2019). <https://www.france24.com/en/20190409-saudi-arabia-nuclear-reactor-energy-iaea-iran>

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