

# GREAT DECISIONS

## *Fall 2018 Update*

**Turkey: partner in crisis • Russia's foreign policy • South Africa's fragile democracy • U.S. global engagement and the military • Global health**

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### Turkey: partner in crisis

Turkey has been struggling to maintain the veneer of democratic government since the Gezi Park protests in 2013. In June 2018, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan won reelection in an atmosphere of widespread repression and a poorly functioning economy. Turkey's foreign policy has been marked by an increasingly prominent shift away from the United States and other NATO allies in favor of closer ties with Russia and Iran.

In addition to President Erdogan's further consolidation of power through institutional reform, the Turkish economy has experienced a substantial amount of turbulence. The value of the lira, Turkey's national currency, has declined relative to the dollar by over 40% in the last year. Concerns have been further exacerbated by increasing trade tensions between the United States and its NATO partner. The Trump administration has increased tariffs on Turkish aluminum and steel by 20% and 50% respectively. These factors, and many others, have reduced Turkish annual GDP growth from over 11% in 2011 to 2.9% in 2016, with low growth predictions moving forward.

The ramifications of Turkey's troubles are likely to have international consequences. Many European nations own Turkish debt, and the lira's fall relative to other global currencies raises questions about the nation's ability to pay back its debtors. In fact, Turkey's credit rating has been downgraded twice by Moody's just in 2018, while S&P Global projects the Turkish economy will fall into a recession in 2019. While the most dramatic implications of this might still be some time off, the situation in Turkey (especially when combined with similar monetary issues in Argentina) has already led to

a devaluation of the euro and increasing fears of slowed growth across developing economies more generally.

In light of its faltering economy, and tough talk from President Trump, Turkey has begun to look to American rivals like Russia and Iran for financial assistance and closer relations. Previously raised concerns about the Turkish purchase of Russian missile systems are becoming more significant in light of new tariffs on material resources and increasingly divergent interests regarding the management of Turkish debt. With the next round of presidential elections coming in October 2019, Turkey is certainly a nation to watch as new strategic and economic realities have the potential to further disrupt the relationship between the Mediterranean nation and its partners in NATO.

#### Recommended Readings

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Peter Kenyon, "How Turkey's Economic Problems Are Viewed in Istanbul," National Public Radio (August 14, 2018). <https://www.npr.org/2018/08/14/638629444/how-turkeys-economic-problems-are-viewed-in-istanbul>

Daron Acemoglu, "To Go Forward, Turkey Must Look Back," Bloomberg News (August 30, 2018). <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-08-30/to-go-forward-turkey-must-look-back>

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## Russia's foreign policy

The status of U.S.-Russian relations and the complex rapport between President Trump and President Vladimir Putin have been carefully watched by international observers. This interest might have reached its peak in July of this year when the two world leaders met in Helsinki, Finland, to discuss topics ranging from military intervention in Syria and North Korean denuclearization, to possible Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Both Trump and Putin have spoken positively of the meeting, highlighting progress on many issues including limiting each nation's nuclear arsenal and cooperation on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Both leaders have, despite occasionally trading rhetorical jabs, expressed interest in a follow-up meeting that many expect to take place sometime in 2019.

Easily the most controversial soundbite to come from the meeting between the two heads of state was President Trump's statement that "I have great confidence in my intelligence people," followed by insistence that "President Putin was extremely strong and powerful" in his denial of interfering in American elections. Trump then went on to say that he doesn't "see any reason why Russia would interfere in the 2016 election." In light of the CIA's assessment that Russian agents, almost absolutely at Putin's directive, did in fact attempt to interfere with the 2016 presidential elections, Trump's unwillingness to publicly rebuke Putin was met with disapproval from both sides of the political aisle. Upon returning to the United States following the summit, President Trump attempted to clarify his comments and claimed that he misspoke on the matter, but this clarification was brought into doubt by individuals as politically different as the late Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT).

While Presidents Trump and Putin might appear to have a generally warm personal relationship, both leaders have made policy choices that make reality feel less rosy than the rhetoric. The two global powers continue to back different sides in the Syrian civil war, and the Trump administration has begun the sale of lethal weapons to Ukraine in the aftermath of the Russian annexation of Crimea. Additionally, President Trump has doubled down on sanctions against Russia and expelled 60 Russian agents from the United States following reports that Russia was actively involved in the poisoning of former Russian agents living in the United Kingdom.

President Trump has stood up to Russia on some

issues while remaining quiet on others. As a consequence of this mixed bag of policies, America's relationship with its Cold War rival will continue to make headlines for some time to come.

### Recommended Readings

Michael Schwartz and Ellen Barry, "A Spy Story: Sergei Skripal Was a Little Fish. He Had a Big Enemy," *The New York Times* (September 10, 2018). <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/09/world/europe/sergei-skripal-russian-spy-poisoning.html>

Anne Kauranen, "It's Time for Realism in EU-Russia Ties: France's Macron," Reuters (August 30, 2018). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-finland-defense-russia/its-time-for-realism-in-eu-russia-ties-frances-macron-idUSKCN1LF0UP>

Philip Ewing, "The Russia Investigations: Can There Be a Final Answer on 'Collusion'?" National Public Radio (September 8, 2018). <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/08/645573100/the-russia-investigations-can-there-be-a-final-answer-on-collusion>

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## South Africa's fragile democracy

The current situation in South Africa highlights that despite becoming one of the most advanced nations in Africa, institutions and the rule of law still need to be strengthened. The current president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, is now faced with the challenge of reviving an economy that is in the midst of dramatic recession while restoring confidence in his nation's institutions following a wave of corruption scandals that forced his predecessor, Jacob Zuma, to resign from office in February 2018.

These scandals come just as a new generation of citizens, with no personal memories of life under apartheid, become eligible to vote. The general lack of trust in the government following the corruption that took down Zuma, leaves the nation's ruling African National Congress party in desperate need of a new way to appeal to voters both old and new.

In addition to promises to make additional investments in infrastructure and to increase efforts to root out corruption, President Ramaphosa has made a con-

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roversial move to seize privately owned land without compensation from the state.

Such a move would require a constitutional amendment, but this seems like a challenge Ramaphosa is willing to undertake. In July 2018, South Africa's president was quoted as saying that "The ANC will through the parliamentary process finalize the proposed amendment to the constitution that outlines more clearly the conditions under which expropriation of land without compensation can be effected." The ANC and its allies are quick to point to the lingering legacy of apartheid and the fact that, despite being a significant minority in the African nation, South Africa's white population owns a much larger percentage of land than would be the case if land were distributed in line with the nation's demographic breakdown. However, these justifications do little to calm the nerves of the current, mostly white, property owners and potential investors. There are also many recent reports of violence against white land owners that will undoubtedly fuel racial tensions.

The combination of concerns about government accountability, an unemployment rate of over 25%, and a newly elected president looking to restore his party's popularity come together to form an unsavory mixture that might prove unhealthy for South Africa's emerging democracy.

### Recommended Readings

The Editorial Board, "A Promise of a Cleaner South Africa," *The New York Times* (August 16, 2018). <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/16/opinion/south-africa-jacob-zuma-corruption.html>

David Frum, "The Dangerous Myths of South African Land Seizures," *The Atlantic* (August 30, 2018). <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/the-danger-of-south-african-land-seizure/568960/>

Sarah Wild, "South Africa Pushes Science to Improve Daily Life," *Nature* (September 6, 2018). <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-06122-9>

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## U.S. global engagement and the military

On September 7, 2018, the United States announced the release of \$1.2 billion in military aid to Egypt in spite of "serious concerns about the human rights situation in Egypt" by the Trump administration, which had suspended all military aid to Egypt last year. The U.S. has given Egypt almost \$80 billion in military financing over the past 80 years, because of Egypt's status as an important U.S. ally in the Middle East.

The U.S. also announced plans on September 7, 2018, to send 1,500 more soldiers to Germany by September 2020, citing a desire to fortify alliances within NATO and improve security in Europe in general. The increased troop presence will begin in 2018, despite Trump's criticisms of NATO as well as Russian president Vladimir Putin's disapproval of the NATO military presence in eastern Europe. On June 18, 2018, President Donald Trump announced his intention to create a sixth branch of the military called the Space Force, or United States Space Command, in order to "protect American interests in outer space." President Trump stated that the focus would be to monitor current American space operations and protect against "military conflicts" in space, arguing that the Air Force does not adequately protect American security in outer space. In August, Vice President Mike Pence voiced his support of the new branch and the plan to implement it by 2020. It is not clear how much support the idea of a new branch of the military and an expansion of American military presence past the stratosphere has in Congress, which would have to approve any such plan. The call for a Space Force comes in response to fears that Russia and China could threaten American satellites in space, which are vital for military communications. Countries such as France and Italy have alleged that Russia has interfered with sensitive military communications, causing France to invest in its own space security. The potential creation of a Space Force would be intended to send a strong message about American military presence globally.



President Trump canceled plans for a large military parade to be held on Veteran's Day in Washington, DC, because the costs to schedule military aircraft, vehicles and troops had soared to over \$90 million. Trump was inspired to have a large military parade to

display America's strength and pride after witnessing the 2017 Bastille Day parade in Paris, France. President Trump has decided to celebrate Armistice Day/Veteran's Day in France for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in November 2018, which will feature a military parade.

### Recommended Readings

Jacqueline Klimas, "Neil deGrasse Tyson: Space Force Mission Should Include Asteroid Defense, Orbital Clean Up," *Politico* (September 7, 2018). <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/07/neil-degrasse-space-forceasteroid-defense-808976>

Liz Schrayner, "Foreign Assistance in the 'America First' Era," *The Brookings Institution* (July 31, 2018). <https://www.brookings.edu/research/foreign-assistance-in-the-america-first-era/>

Maria Abi-Habib, "U.S. and India, Wary of China, Agree to Strengthen Military Ties," *The New York Times* (September 6, 2018). <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/06/world/asia/us-india-military-agreement.html>

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## Global Health

On May 16<sup>th</sup>, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a list of diagnostic tests "essential" for all health care systems, setting universal standards for testing patients as well as promoting the construction of laboratories around the world. In 1977, WHO had published a list of essential medicines that transformed health care around the world; WHO hopes this new list, and plans to publish an "essential devices" list, will be just as revolutionary for global health.



Creating vaccines against deadly diseases such as HIV, hepatitis C, malaria and others has become too expensive to achieve in the next 12 years, a study by the Gates Foundation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Coordination found. The current spending of \$3 billion annually on this research would have to triple globally in order to complete vaccines by 2030. Funding for developments of these vaccines has been decreasing since 2009, despite a brief surge for Ebola funding. Researchers argue that even vaccines that offer some protection could save lives, especially those of newborn babies.

An Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in August saw over 100 active cases at its peak, but has been waning as fewer and fewer new cases are reported. New protocols for stopping the spread of the virus included vaccines for health care workers as well as the creation of quarantine "cubes" that eliminated the need for heavy protective gear for medical personnel. The cubes, made out of clear plastic and air-conditioned, allowed patients to feel more comfortable with nurses and facilitated safety for the patients' visitors. More transparent treatment processes cause more patients to go to medical centers rather than attempting home treatment, according to medical coordinators for Doctors Without Borders. By approving the emergency use of prospective Ebola treatments in DRC, health authorities also hope to reduce the public's wariness of receiving treatment and the stigma of those suffering from and surviving the disease.

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Veerabhadran Ramanathan, Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Partha Dasgupta, Joachim von Braun, and David G. Victor, "Climate Extremes and Global Health," *Foreign Affairs* (July 31, 2018). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-07-31/climate-extremes-and-global-health>

Laura Santhanam, "Why Is So Little Global Funding Devoted to Adolescent Health?" PBS (August 10, 2018). <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/why-is-so-little-global-funding-devoted-to-adolescent-health>

Robert David Hart, "Who's to Blame When a Machine Botches Your Surgery?" *Quartz* (September 10, 2018). <https://qz.com/1367206/whos-to-blame-when-a-machine-botches-your-surgery/>

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