



In this file photo taken on Nov 10, 2016, US President Barack Obama and President-elect Donald Trump shake hands during a transition planning meeting in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on June 28, 2019, China's President Xi Jinping shakes hands with US President Donald Trump before a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Osaka.

Trump, Syria and Facebook: Volatile cocktail of the 2010s

The Arab Spring gave way to bloodletting in Syria, a refugee exodus and surging militant violence. Obama gave way to Trump. The United Kingdom chose to Brexit. And for many around the world, while the 2010s began with hope for a more equitable world, they end with a slide towards nationalistic populism. The following is a look at some of the people and events that shaped the past decade:

America divided

The United States will begin the 2020s with Donald Trump in the Oval Office, as a president of a country riven by political, societal and economic discord - and a leader facing impeachment. Trump - who is accused of abusing his power to ask a foreign nation, Ukraine, to investigate a domestic political rival - has every chance of being acquitted by the Senate, where his Republican Party faithful hold the majority.

But Trump still stands to become the third ever US president to be impeached, after Bill Clinton and Andrew Johnson - Richard Nixon having resigned before he could face judgment by lawmakers. The stranger-than-fiction unfolding of his presidency mirrors his rise to power - in 2016, it seemed unfathomable to some that a real estate mogul-turned-reality show star would lead the world's biggest economy.

But he defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton in what was for many an upset for the ages, and the tall New Yorker with the wispy blond mane succeeded Barack Obama, America's first black president. Obama was a Nobel peace laureate; Trump once hosted "The Apprentice." POTUS 44 and 45 could not be more different.

Trump - who is a climate change skeptic, a protectionist and tough on immigration - has eschewed tradition and run the White House his way, taking no prisoners. "From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this moment on, it's going to be America First," he said on the Capitol steps in his inauguration speech on January 20, 2017.

As the 2010s draw to a close, the booming success of the American economy will help his chances at re-election next year. Abroad, Trump is rough with his allies, flouts international agreements and does not hesitate to boost his ties with authoritarian governments like that of North Korea's Kim Jong Un.

A disappointing Arab Spring

After the decade began with the hope of the Arab Spring, it ends with strongmen back in power in several countries. On Jan 14, 2011, Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was chased from office by a popular rebellion that was unthinkable only a few weeks before. The Arab Spring erupted in the Middle East and North Africa. Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was toppled that same year in a NATO-backed uprising.

In Egypt, the protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square spelled the end of Hosni Mubarak's reign, but the country ended the decade in the iron grip of general turned President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. The fate of millions of people would be changed in Syria. A protest movement against the ruling Assad family descended into a bloody crackdown and eventually a brutal civil war. In eight years of conflict since early 2011, more than 370,000 people have been killed and millions have been displaced from their homes. And the conflict has gone global.

Russia intervened on behalf of Bashar Al-Assad. Turkey moved to prevent the Kurds from setting up a stronghold on the border. The West built a coalition to defeat the "caliphate" of the Islamic State (IS), an extremist group that profited from the chaos to claim swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq. The militants wrought havoc, and attracted thousands of foreign fighters - mainly from Europe - to their cause.

Europe destabilized

Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed the establishment of the "caliphate" in June 2014, extending from Aleppo in northern Syria to Diyala in Iraq. The organization would eclipse Al-Qaeda and unleash a new torrent of violence, taking several forms. It encouraged its followers to commit their own elementary acts of terror, rather than stage elaborate operations like the Sept 11 attacks.

On Nov 13, 2015, a Belgium-based cell run from Syria descended on Paris, killing 130 people in bombings and shootings at a concert hall, bars, restaurants, and the Stade de France sports stadium. At the Bataclan, a fabled Paris concert venue, 90 people died at a show by American group Eagles of Death Metal. France, Belgium, Denmark and Britain all fell victim to attacks in the course of the decade. The movement swept through



An image grab taken from a propaganda video released on July 5, 2014 by Al-Furqan Media allegedly shows the leader of the Islamic State (IS) group Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, aka Caliph Ibrahim, addressing Muslim worshippers at a mosque in the militant-held northern Iraqi city of Mosul.

Africa's vast Sahel region, and parts of Asia.

But the United States, their Kurdish allies and European nations together seized back the IS "caliphate" - which was declared eliminated in March this year. And Baghdadi was killed in a raid by US special forces - he died "like a dog", as Trump said on Oct 27.

Migrant tragedies

The Syrian conflict resulted in the export of violence, but also in an immense human tragedy on Europe's doorstep, as millions left their homes in search of security and a better life. They crisscrossed Europe in giant processions, ending up in whichever country

would welcome them with open arms. Chancellor Angela Merkel's Germany thought it could absorb the influx of refugees. "If Europe fails on the question of refugees, if this close link with universal civil rights is broken, then it won't be the Europe we wished for," she said on Aug 31, 2015. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians would end up in Germany.

But the pressure mounted in countries straining under the weight of the constant arrivals of people in dire straits. In the north of France, at the port of Calais, migrants crammed into makeshift camps waiting for a chance to cross the English Channel to

Britain. In the Mediterranean, desperate migrants made the journey through north Africa to the sea, using rickety boats and rafts to try to get to Europe. Many did not survive.

In the United States, Trump made the fight against migrants illegally entering the country from Mexico one of his signature political issues. And he asked Congress for billions of dollars to build a wall to help keep them out. Trump's rise emboldened a surging wave of populist and far-right political movements - from Hungary's Viktor Orban to Italy's Matteo Salvini and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro.

In France, the far-right remained a political force thanks to the Le Pen family, and gathered strength in Germany, where some questioned the soundness of Merkel's open arms. In Britain, a historic 2016 referendum in which voters opted to leave the European Union promised to change the complexion of the continent. After a tortuous process, Prime Minister Boris Johnson seems on his way to leading the United Kingdom out of the bloc after an election win, with the blessing of Trump, the first US leader not to back European unity.

Citizens take action

As 2019 comes to an end, one Swedish teenager has rewritten the rules about activism and awakened public consciousness about the fight against climate change. Millions of young people see themselves in 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, and think their elders have sacrificed the planet on the altar of economic growth and creature comforts. "How dare you?" the teen said in September at the United Nations, challenging world leaders over their inaction on global warming.

In a decade that began with a major nuclear accident in Japan sparked by an earthquake and deadly tsunami, the world



This file photo taken on Oct 1, 2019, shows the logos of mobile apps Facebook and Google displayed on a tablet in Lille, France.



In this file photo taken on Dec 11, 2019, Britain's Prime Minister and Conservative party leader Boris Johnson poses after hammering a "Get Brexit Done" sign into the garden of a supporter, with a sledgehammer as he campaigns with his team in Benfleet, east of London.