

January 1 – January 15

AREA BRIEF

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Area Briefs: 1-15 January 2017

General Observations

Pakistan

- Controversy continues to haunt the PMLN govt in its relationship with the military. After General Sharif's retirement, within barely a month, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif stated that the General would be taking command of the Saudi-led alliance of Muslim states. He then declares the General had not sought a NOC from the government and then he proceeds to retract his earlier statement of the General joining the Saudi-led coalition in the first place. During this period a non-issue came to dominate the public political discourse especially since the Saudi-led coalition continues to generate controversy as many see it as an anti-Iran coalition. In the end General Sharif issued a statement saying there was no truth in his taking up the assignment in Saudi Arabia.
- The government also generated civil-military controversy over the issue of the renewal of military courts after the two years of their mandated existence was over in the first week of January. With no clear stand on the issue the government finds itself in a bind because its own political allies in parliament are not favourably disposed towards an extension in these courts. The opposition parties are also reluctant given that the government has not moved at all on reforming the criminal judicial system – something that was to have been done in the two-year period of the military courts.
- Pakistan moved closer towards acquiring a stable second-strike capability when, on 9 January, it successfully tested its first submarine-launched cruise missile (SLCM) Babur 3, capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. Pakistan has already successfully tested its ground-launched cruise missiles. India continues to have problems with its cruise missile development.
- Meanwhile, the new Indian army chief, General Bipin Rawat, in a television interview on 6 January, reasserted the reliance by India on the ColdStart doctrine “for conventional military operations.” This is a pre-emptive doctrine that attempts to rationalize a limited conventional war under the nuclear overhang and is extremely destabilizing. It has already compelled Pakistan to develop its tactical short-range missile Nasr.
- The Pak-US relationship continues to suffer from an inherent instability premised on differing expectations. The US Defence Secretary-designate, General “Mad Dog” Mattis made the “do more” demand on Pakistan in the context of militant groups. A few days earlier, at the start of the new year, US Secretary of State, John Kerry had noted that Pakistan was one of the few countries where the US had constructed state-of-the-art tactical security operations centres in the US embassy. This raises serious concerns over

how intrusive an access the US will have on Pakistan's state structures, including the sensitive ones.

- Another political issue that has raised its head is the disappearance of rights activists active on social media. Five of these activists disappeared from various cities within the space of a week.

International

- President-elect Donald Trump continues to generate controversies especially through his tweets, which seem to be his main form of expressing his policy intent on different issues. From disbelieving intel reports on Russian hacking and interference in the US electoral process to targeting his critics, Trump has already shown he will be a factor for polarization within the US rather than a unifying factor.
- In terms of foreign relations also Trump has targeted China and threatened to reverse the "One China" policy. In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang, on 15 January, said the "One China" principle was non-negotiable and was the basis for relations with the US. Trump has also created antagonism with Mexico over the border wall and with NATO states as well as EU members.
- Meanwhile, Obama declared a continuation of the national emergency against Iran, 14 January, despite Iran fulfilling its commitments under the nuclear deal on grounds that Iran continues to present "an unusual and extraordinary threat" to the US.
- Clearly the US-Iran relationship will continue to be veering on the hostile especially with Trump threatening to renege on the multilateral Iran nuclear deal. Meanwhile, Iranian lawmakers approved to increase military spending to 5% of the budget, including the development of long-range missiles.
- Obama also extended the state of emergency vis a vis Libya, Ukraine, Zimbabwe, Cuba and Venezuela. Amongst other measures, the state of emergency is the premise for most US sanctions against other countries.
- The new UN Secretary General, António Guterres, took charge on 1 January and on 10 January he emphasised that his focus would be on peace building through conflict resolution and sustained development.

- Figures continue to pour in on the growing number of deaths of migrants while crossing the Mediterranean Sea. In the latest such incident, on 14 January, a hundred migrants were reported missing after their boat sank off the coast of Libya.
- Migrants in Europe are also facing a life threat from having no proper shelter against the extreme cold that has spread across Europe. Many humanitarian organisations have accused European governments of letting the refugees “freeze to death”.

--- Dr Shireen M Mazari

Director General

AMERICAS

Domestic

- According to the *BBC* on January 14, politicians, entertainers and others defended civil rights campaigner, Congressman John Lewis, after he became embroiled in a row with President-elect Donald Trump.

Trump tweeted that Lewis was “all talk” and should focus on his constituents, after he said Trump was not a legitimate president. However, Lewis’ supporters reacted with anger, saying he was a hero and an icon. Lewis was a leading figure during the 1960s civil rights movement. He is the last surviving speaker from the March on Washington 50 years ago, led by Martin Luther King.

- On January 11, President Barack Obama called on Americans to defend their democracy, in his farewell speech in Chicago.

Obama warned that democracy was threatened whenever it was taken for granted. He urged Americans to consider things from each other’s point of view. The country’s first black president was first elected in 2008 on a message of hope and change. His successor has vowed to undo some of Obama’s signature policies.

- On January 11, President-elect Donald Trump accused US intelligence agencies of leaking allegations that Russia had compromising material on him.

Responding to unsubstantiated allegations that his election team had colluded with Russia and there existed scandalous videos of his private life, Trump said, “That’s something that Nazi Germany would have done.” Head of US spy agency James Clapper denied that the content was leaked from a classified briefing. However, Intelligence agencies considered the claims relevant enough to brief both Trump and President Obama. Trump also said for the first time that he accepted Russia was behind hacking attacks that took place during the presidential campaign. According to reports, Senator John McCain had passed documents to the FBI director, James Comey, in December 2016 alleging secret contacts between the Trump campaign and Moscow and that Russian intelligence had personally compromising material on the president-elect himself.

- On January 10, Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions, President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee to be the new attorney general denied sympathising with the Ku Klux Klan, in a tough Senate confirmation hearing.

Sessions also pledged to remove himself from any investigation into former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. A Democratic senator expressed “deep concern” about

the nomination. However, Democrats do not have the power in the chamber to block his confirmation.

- On January 9, Esteban Ruiz Santiago appeared in court to hear charges against him.
- On January 7, five people were shot dead by a gunman at Fort Lauderdale airport in Florida.

Santiago has been accused of murdering five people at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International airport January 7, 2017. Eight people were also injured during the attack. According to witnesses the attacker walked along the baggage carousels, shooting people as they tried to flee. Florida Senator Bill Nelson later told US media that the gunman had been identified as Esteban Santiago, an Iraq war veteran. He had surrendered to police when he ran out of ammunition.

- On January 6, the US Congress certified the Electoral College vote that gave Donald Trump his victory in the contentious 2016 presidential election.

The electoral votes were opened before a joint session of Congress in what is considered a formality for most presidential elections. The thirty-minute meeting was interrupted by various Democratic challenges. In a symbolic move that exposed lingering disappointment over a contentious election campaign, members of the House of Representatives objected to the electoral tally in states including Alabama, Florida, Michigan, Texas, Mississippi and the Carolinas.

- On January 3, Republican Senator Mike Enzi introduced a resolution allowing for the repeal of Obamacare.

The move set in motion the Republican majority's promise to repeal the 2010 Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare, as its first major legislative item. Republicans have said the repeal process could take months and that developing replacement health insurance plans could take years. President Obama's signature healthcare insurance plan provides coverage to millions of Americans. More than 20 million previously uninsured Americans gained health coverage through Obamacare.

International

- According to *Reuters* on January 12, retired Marine General James Mattis put Russia at the top of a list of threats to US interests.

Mattis is President-elect Donald Trump's nominee to lead the Pentagon. He told Congress that America must be ready to confront Moscow where necessary, even as he backed Trump's bid for better relations. The remarks were the latest by one of Trump's Cabinet nominees that veered away from Trump's campaign rhetoric, which included praise for Russian President Vladimir Putin and pledged to improve ties with him. Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson also expressed views different from those expressed by Trump on key foreign policy issues including nuclear proliferation, trade deals, climate change and relations with Mexico. Mattis termed Russia, China and Islamist militants the biggest challenge to the US-led world order since World War Two, and called for Congress to lift spending caps undermining military preparedness.

- According to the Volkswagen group, on January 10 it negotiated a \$4.3bn draft settlement with US regulators to resolve its diesel emissions troubles.

The company also plans to plead guilty to charges of criminal misconduct. The plea is part of the deal to settle the scandal, as Volkswagen (VW) looks to restore its tarnished global image. VW announced that, with the addition of the fine, its diesel scandal costs would exceed the nearly £15.76bn it set aside to handle the problem, adding that it will face oversight by an independent monitor over the next three years.

- On January 9, Alibaba Executive Chairman Jack Ma met President-elect Donald Trump.

Ma laid out his company's new plan to bring one million small US businesses onto its platform. They would then be able to sell to Chinese consumers over the next five years. Alibaba Group Holding Ltd (BABA.N) expects the initiative to create one million US jobs in the process. The Chinese e-commerce giant had previously campaigned to bring more small US businesses onto the company's sites, but this is the first time Ma has discussed specific targets.

- Oil prices tumbled nearly 4% on January 9 over concerns that record Iraqi crude exports and rising US output would undermine OPEC's efforts to curb global oversupply.

US crude settled at \$51.96, hitting a 3-week low. In Iraq, OPEC's second-biggest producer, oil exports from the southern Basra ports reached a record high of 3.51 million barrels per day during December 2016.

- According to *Reuters* on January 9, President-elect Donald Trump accepted the US intelligence community's conclusion that Russia engaged in cyber attacks during the presidential election.

According to his incoming chief of staff, Reince Priebus, Trump may take action in response. Priebus said Trump believed Russia was behind the intrusions into the Democratic Party

organisations, although he did not clarify whether the president-elect agreed that Russian President Vladimir Putin directed the hacks. “He accepts the fact that this particular case has entities in Russia, so that’s not the issue,” Priebus said. This was the first acknowledgment from a senior member of the President elect’s team that Trump had accepted that Russia directed the hacking and subsequent disclosure of Democratic emails during the 2016 presidential election.

- The US intelligence community concluded in a declassified report released on January 6 that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an “influence campaign” aimed at hurting Hillary Clinton and helping Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

The campaign consisted of hacking Democratic groups and individuals, including Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta, and releasing that information via third-party websites, including WikiLeaks. The effort led to what the intelligence report termed “a significant escalation” in longtime Russian efforts to undermine “the US-led liberal democratic order.”

- On January 6, US President-elect Donald Trump said that Mexico would pay for his planned border wall “later.”

The announcement came after Republican officials indicated that the Congress and US taxpayers would first foot the bill. Trump’s response came after Republican officials said Congress might make funds available for the wall, saying this would just be for the “sake of speed”. He also criticised the “dishonest media” for failing to report “any money spent on building the Great Wall” would be reimbursed. The plan for taxpayers to advance the cash could be seen as a broken promise by some of Trump’s most ardent supporters. “Build the wall” was not only a key campaign promise from Trump, but also a popular chant at his rallies.

- On January 2, Donald Trump criticised China for not doing enough to control North Korea.

In his latest tweet Trump criticised Beijing for benefiting from trade with the US while not doing its bit to rein in Pyongyang. “China has been taking out massive amounts of money & wealth from the US in totally one-sided trade, but won’t help with North Korea. Nice!” he tweeted. Chinese media responded angrily saying Trump was “pandering to ‘irresponsible’ attitudes.”

Canada

- On January 14, Ahmed Hussen, a Somalian refugee, became Canada’s new Minister of Immigration.

Ahmed Hussen arrived in Canada in 1993 from war-ravaged Somalia. He was named the country's newest minister of immigration in a reshuffle of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Cabinet. It was a fast political rise for the politician, and will put Hussen in charge of the complex portfolio that oversees immigration. According to observers the minister will be able to draw from personal experience in his new role. Hussen replaces John McCallum, a veteran politician who is going to become Canada's envoy to China after managing Trudeau government efforts to bring in over 39,000 Syrian refugees during the last 13 months.

Latin America

- On January 12, the Obama Administration repealed a measure granting automatic residency to virtually every Cuban who arrived in the United States, whether or not they had visas.

The decision is effective immediately and will end a longstanding exception to US immigration policy. The "wet foot, dry foot" policy, had allowed any Cuban who reached US soil to stay but returned those picked up at sea. Cuban officials had sought the change for years. The shift had been in the works for months. It was announced abruptly because advance warning would have inspired thousands to take to the seas between Cuba and Florida in order to beat a deadline. The US and Cuba spent several months negotiating the deal, including an agreement from Cuba to allow those turned away from the US to return.

- On January 12, Mexico's president, Enrique Peña Nieto rejected claims by US President-elect Donald Trump that his country would pay for the border wall.

Nieto also pledged to sign an updated free-trade agreement with the EU in an effort to diversify the Mexican economy away from the US. Speaking in an uncharacteristically stern and straightforward manner, Peña Nieto told an audience of Mexican diplomats, "All matters that define our bilateral relationship are on the table including security, immigration and commerce." However, he said any negotiations must include topics such as putting an end to the flow of illegal guns across the border and arming deadly drug cartels.

- According to the BBC on February 9, BMW has said that it is "absolutely" committed to a new plant in Mexico despite US President elect Donald Trump's hostility to imported cars.

Trump criticised General Motors for building cars in Mexico for the US market and threatened to impose a "border" tax on firms manufacturing cars in Mexico for the US market. BMW is spending \$1bn on a plant in Mexico, while other firms are investing in the US or moving production back. On January 7, 2016 Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) announced a \$1bn plan to produce three

Jeep models in the US. FCA will also move the production of a Ram pickup truck from Mexico to the US.

---Amina Afzal

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On January 12, India launched its second French-design Scorpene-class submarine, INS Khanderi, in Mumbai at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL).

INS Khanderi will undergo sea trials before its induction into the Indian Navy. It is a diesel-electric submarine with an ability to undertake various missions including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying and surveillance. The submarine also has the ability to launch precision-guided weapons, torpedoes and tube-launched anti-ship missiles both on surface and under water. INS Khanderi is the second of six submarines that are being built at MDL. The first submarine was Kalvari, currently undergoing sea acceptance trials.

- On January 11, Iranian lawmakers approved plans aimed at increasing the country's military spending to 5% of the budget, including the development of its long-range missiles.

173 lawmakers voted in favour of Iran's five-year development plan that requires the government to enhance military capabilities by allocating 5% of the country's annual budget to its military. Only 10 lawmakers voted against the plan. Besides enhancing conventional military capabilities, the plan also aims at developing cyber-war capabilities, armed drones and long-range missiles. Defence experts have warned that development of long-range missiles would draw criticism from Western countries, which believe that Iran's ballistic missile tests are inconsistent with the UN resolution that calls on Iran to refrain from working on ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons. Iran maintains however that it has not carried out any work on missiles specifically designed to carry nuclear weapons.

- On January 11, the *Korean Times* cited South Korea's 2016 Defence White Paper saying North Korea has enough weapon-grade fissile material to produce 10 nuclear warheads. *The report indicated that North Korea has increased its stockpile of weapon-grade plutonium to about 50 kg from 40 since 2014. The paper also highlights North Korea's significant advancement in the ability to miniaturise nuclear warheads and also in enriching uranium. North Korea has also made considerable efforts to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM). However, the country has yet to complete its ICBM programme. The paper also explained that the North is trying to complete work on technologies related to a stable missile flight.*

- On January 11, a delegation of Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) visited Pakistan under the leadership of Ham Sang-Wook, Director General for Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, and current chair of the MTCR.

Tasnim Aslam, Additional Secretary (UN&EC) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led the Pakistani delegation. She informed the delegation about Pakistan's contribution to international

efforts aimed at preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. Aslam also briefed the MTCR delegation on Pakistan's effective and comprehensive export control regime and on the administrative, legislative and regulatory measures that have been adopted for the establishment of a robust command and control system. Highlighting the risks posed to regional strategic stability by India's development of ballistic missile defence system and introduction of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), she reiterated Pakistan's commitment to avoiding any sort of arms race in the region.

- On January 11, the Government of Pakistan notified a revised control list of goods, technologies, material and equipment related to nuclear and biological weapons and their delivery systems under the Export Control Act of 2004.

The Export Control Act of 2004 enables Pakistan to control the export, re-export, transit of goods, technologies, material and equipment related to nuclear and biological weapons and their delivery systems. In consultation with other relevant ministries and departments, the Strategic Export Control Division (SECDIV) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has revised the control lists as part of its regular review process. The notification of revised control lists signifies Pakistan's continuing efforts to advance the shared goals of nuclear non-proliferation.

- According to *Reuters* on January 10, an anonymous US official said that a Chinese strategic bomber flew around the Spratly Islands in a new show of force in the South China Sea.

This was the second flight by a Chinese bomber in the South China Sea in 2017, the first one was on January 1, 2017. The flight came in the wake of US President-elect Donald Trump's announcement that he would take a tougher approach against China after assuming office on January 20, 2017. Trump has also angered China by breaking with decades of US policy and speaking to the Taiwanese president via telephone.

- On January 9, Pakistan successfully test-fired its first ever nuclear capable submarine-launched cruise missile (SLCM) Babur-3.

Babur-3, a sea-based variant of the Ground Launched Cruise Missile (GLCM) Babur-2, was fired from an underwater, mobile platform in the Indian Ocean to hit a land-based target at an undisclosed location. According to a press release from the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), 'the successful attainment of a second strike capability by Pakistan represents a major scientific milestone; it is manifestation of the strategy of measured response to nuclear strategies and postures being adopted in Pakistan's neighborhood.' With a range 450 kilometres Babur-3 is capable of delivering various types of payloads. The missile has state-of-the-art technologies, including underwater controlled propulsion and advanced guidance and navigation features, augmented by global navigation, terrain and scene matching systems. Babur-3 also features terrain hugging and sea skimming flight capabilities to evade hostile radars and air defences, in addition to certain stealth technologies. According to defence analysts, the successful test of the missile would help stabilise deterrence which has been disturbed by India's sea based nuclear

capable missiles including K-4 and K-15. John Kirby, a US State Department spokesman said that all nuclear weapon states should avoid nuclear and missile tests.

- On January 5, China's state-run media, *Global Times*, criticised India for testing Agni-IV and Agni-V ballistic missiles saying that India has broken UN limits on nuclear weapons and long-range missiles.
- On January 2, India successfully test-fired Agni-IV a long-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile from Abdul Kalam Island, off its Odisha coast.

The test was conducted by India's Strategic Forces Command (SFC). According to SFC the successful test-flight of the Agni-IV proved the reliability and efficiency of India's long-range ballistic missile system. This was the sixth test of the missile. The missile's earlier tests were conducted in 2011, 2012, and twice in 2014 and once in 2015. Agni-IV is a two-stage solid propellant surface-to-surface ballistic missile that can carry a 1 tonne nuclear warhead over a distance of 4000 kilometres. According to India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the missile is equipped with state-of-the-art avionics. The latest test of the Agni-IV comes a week after the successful final flight-test of India's Agni-V surface-to-surface intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on December 26, 2016. Apart from short-range Prithvi and Dhanush missiles, India has inducted Agni-I, Agni-II and Agni-III missiles meant for deterring Pakistan. The Agni-IV and Agni-V missiles are designed for deterring China. Responding to India's consecutive long-range ballistic missile tests, Chinese state-run media, Global Times, stated that India has broken UN limits on its development of nuclear arms and long-range missiles and, therefore, Pakistan should also have the same privileges in nuclear development that India enjoys. The editorial also claimed that Pakistan's nuclear missiles would also see an increase in their ranges.

- On January 1, North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un said that his country is close to testing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

In his New Year's address, Kim said, "Research and development of the cutting-edge tech weapons are actively progressing and strengthening our defence capabilities, including last stage preparation of tests for intercontinental ballistic rocket launch have been continuously succeeding." Kim also said that North Korea would keep increasing its nuclear and missile capabilities for self defence unless the US stops its nuclear threats to the country. North Korea has conducted two nuclear and various missile launches in 2016. Though nuclear experts are divided over how close the country is in realising its full nuclear ambitions, all agree that Pyongyang has made huge strides in that direction. Nuclear experts believe that North Korea's claim of launching an ICBM is plausible because the country had been working through 2016 on developing components for an ICBM. Melissa Hanham, a senior research associate at the US-based Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, said that North Korea was much further along in its missile development than most people realise. She said, "North Korea has been testing rocket engines and heat-shields for an ICBM while developing the technology to

guide a missile after re-entry into the atmosphere following a lift-off.” Once fully developed, a North Korean ICBM could threaten the whole of the US, which is around 9,000 km away from the country.

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA & EAST ASIA

China

- On January 15, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said that ‘One China’ principle is non-negotiable adding that it forms the political foundation for relations with the US.

China also urged “relevant parties” to be aware of the sensitivity of the Taiwan issue, which is central to the One China principle. The remarks came in response to Donald Trump’s recent statement in which he said “Everything is under negotiation, including One China”.

- On January 15, China handed over two maritime patrol vessels to Pakistan for joint security along the CPEC sea route.

According to media reports, the Chinese government is expected to provide two more ships namely Dasht and Zhob to the Pakistan’s navy. The ships will be part of Pakistan Navy and will be used to protect important sea lanes in the Arabian Sea. The development is another indication of strengthening defence ties between Islamabad and Beijing who are already close strategic partners.

- On January 13, Chinese state media warned that the blocking of Chinese access by the US to islands in the South China Sea would lead to “devastating confrontation.”

The reaction came after US Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson said the US should deny Beijing access to new islands in the South China Sea. Tillerson likened China’s island building to Russia’s annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. China warned that Tillerson’s remarks showed ignorance of Sino-US relations and diplomacy in general.

- According to *Reuters* on January 11, the Taiwanese air force and navy scrambled jets and ships after China’s sole aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, entered the Taiwan Strait.

China has said the Liaoning was on an exercise to test weapons and equipment in the South China Sea and that its movements complied with international law. It is the latest escalation amid tensions between the two neighbours, and Taiwanese authorities have asked the public to remain calm.

Japan

- During his visit to Philippines on January 13, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with Philippine’s President Rodrigo Duterte. The two leaders agreed after the meeting that a US commitment to the Asia-Pacific is needed to ensure peace and prosperity in the region.

The two leaders also underlined the issue of China’s military build-up in the South China Sea and vowed to resolve disputes under the rule of law. The Philippines has conflicting claims with China in the South China Sea along with four other countries. According to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Duterte told Abe that he is ready to have direct talks with China concerning the South China Sea. However, Duterte had previously suggested setting aside the territorial dispute with Beijing in favour of boosting economic cooperation with China.

Myanmar

- According to *Al Jazeera* on January 15, UN special rapporteur on human rights Yanghee Lee was denied access to some areas in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State.

The authorities in Myanmar have cited security concerns for denying the access. According to the UN, at least 65,000 Rohingya have reportedly fled across the border to Bangladesh to escape violence allegedly committed by Myanmar's military, including the burning of homes, rape and murder of civilians. The Myanmar government and military have denied all the allegations.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

EUROPE

- According to the *BBC* on January 15, a major international conference to begin peace talks between Israel and Palestine is being held in Paris.

Delegates from 70 nations are expected to reaffirm support for a two-state solution to the longstanding conflict. Palestinians have welcomed the meeting. Israel says the conference is aimed against it. The last round of direct peace talks collapsed amid acrimony in April 2014. Israel and Palestine were invited to hear the conclusions of the meeting, but not to participate in the Summit itself.

- On January 14, hundred migrant passengers were reported missing in the Mediterranean Sea after their boat sank off the coast of Libya.

The Italian coastguard said eight bodies had been recovered from the water, and four people had been rescued. However, dozens are still believed missing after darkness fell, in difficult search conditions. The boat sank between Libya and Italy, about 50km from the Libyan coast. A French naval ship, two trade vessels, and aerial support were involved in the search.

- On January 11, Germany said 280,000 asylum seekers arrived there in 2016, a decrease from the more than 600,000 from 2015.

The German interior minister attributed the decrease to the closure in 2016 of the Balkan route and the migrant deal between the EU and Turkey. Almost 890,000 people came as migrants and refugees travelling through Greece and the Balkans into Germany after Chancellor Angela Merkel ordered a temporary open-door asylum policy.

- According to *The Independent* on January 11, Humanitarian organisations have condemned European governments for leaving refugees to “freeze to death” as the continent experiences below freezing temperatures.

At least four asylum seekers are believed dead and thousands more remain at risk while sleeping on the streets or in tents and inadequate shelters. In Bulgaria, two Iraqi men and a Somali woman died of hypothermia after journeying through the snow, while an Afghan man died in Greece as temperatures plummeted to minus 14C. Ten people died of cold in Poland. Deaths have also been reported in Italy, the Czech Republic, Russia and Ukraine.

- On January 12, The Kremlin criticised the biggest deployment of US troops in Europe since the end of the cold war, branding the arrival of troops and tanks in Poland as a threat to Russia’s national security.

The deployment will see US troops permanently stationed along Russia's western border for the first time. About 1,000 of a promised 4,000 troops have already arrived in Poland. Some people waved and held up American flags as the troops, tanks and heavy armoured vehicles crossed into south-western Poland from Germany.

- UK Immigration Minister Robert Goodwill suggested on January 11 that companies could be charged to hire skilled workers from the EU after Brexit.

A £ 1,000 immigration "skills charge" would be introduced in April 2017 for firms recruiting workers from the EU. One business group said the idea had "raised eyebrows" while a top European politician called it "shocking." However, Downing Street downplayed the incident saying that Goodwill's remarks had been "misinterpreted" and that such a levy was "not on the government's agenda."

- On January 10, Switzerland won a case at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) obliging Muslim parents to send their children to mixed swimming lessons.

According to the ruling, authorities were justified in giving precedence to enforcing "the full school curriculum" and the children's "successful integration" into society.

The ECHR acknowledged that religious freedom was being interfered with but did not amount to a violation. Two Swiss nationals of Turkish origin refused to send their teenage daughters to the compulsory mixed lessons in the city of Basel and filed the case. Education officials, however, said that exemptions were available only for girls who had reached the age of puberty, which the girls had not reached at the time.

- On January 9, Russia dismissed US allegations that it ran a hacking campaign to influence the American presidential elections.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Moscow was tired of the accusations. He termed a report released by US intelligence agencies detailing the allegations, as being groundless. The unclassified report alleges that Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered the hacking of Democratic Party emails to damage Donald Trump's Democrat rival, Hillary Clinton, and influence the election.

- On January 9, UK foreign Secretary Boris Johnson claimed that the UK would be "first in line" for a free trade deal with the US after Donald Trump takes office on 20 January.

During his hastily arranged trip to the US to reinforce ties with Donald Trump's transition team, Johnson declared that the incoming administration had "a very exciting agenda of change".

Johnson's claim about the UK's future status as Washington's preferred trading partner was a pointed reference to President Obama's warning during the EU referendum campaign that Britain would be at the back of the queue for a trade deal if it chose Brexit.

- According to *Jane's Defence Weekly* on January 6, a rotational US Army brigade combat team arrived in Europe as part of an effort to reassure Eastern European allies who fear Russian incursions.

Under Operation "Atlantic Resolve", US Army Europe will conduct continuous rotations of US-based Armored Brigade Combat Teams (ABCT) as part of a wider effort to balance against Russian influence in the region with US presence, known as the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI).

- On January 4, France's far-right leader Marine Le Pen outlined plans for France to leave the euro should she win the 2017 presidential election.

Le Pen proposed however that Europe could return to a parallel common unit in a bid to soften the economic impact. French voters will elect their new president in April and May 2017. According to polls, conservative candidate Francois Fillon, who won the centre-right nomination in the November 2016 primary vote, will face National Front (FN) leader Le Pen in the second round of voting.

- On January 1, Fifty Moroccan and five Spanish border guards were injured when 1,100 African migrants attempted to storm a border fence.

The migrants were trying to reach Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta. Only two were successful, but both were injured scaling the six-metre fence and needed hospital treatment. The attempt comes after more than 400 migrants succeeded in breaching Ceuta's fence in December 2016. Hundreds of sub-Saharan African migrants living illegally in Morocco try to enter Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's other North African enclave, each year in the hope of getting to Europe. The enclaves are Europe's only land borders in Africa.

---Amina Afzal

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Iran

- *PressTv* reported on January 14 that US President Barack Obama has declared a continuation of the national emergency against Iran, claiming that despite full commitment to its nuclear deal with world powers, Iran still poses “an unusual and extraordinary threat” to the US.

Obama informed Congress of his decision in a letter saying that the national emergency, which was declared on March 15, 1995, would “continue in effect beyond March 15, 2017.” The National Emergencies Act requires the president to extend a national emergency within 90 days of its anniversary date, before it is automatically terminated. Obama admitted in his letter that Iran had delivered on its commitments pursuant to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In November 2016, Obama extended a separate national emergency against Iran, which was originally declared by former US President Jimmy Carter on November 14, 1979. He also extended the state of emergency with respect to Libya, Ukraine, Zimbabwe, Cuba and Venezuela. A state of emergency gives the US president special powers, including the ability to seize property, summon the National Guard and hire and fire military officers at will. The state of emergency also forms the basis for most US sanctions against other countries.

- On January 10, Iran announced it had finally received an official invitation from Saudi Arabia for its pilgrims to attend 2017 Haj, two weeks after Riyadh announced it.

There was no official Iranian delegation at 2016 pilgrimage to the holy places in Saudi Arabia after the Kingdom severed relations with Iran following the torching of its missions in Tehran and Mashhad by protesters in January 2016. It was the first time in three decades that Iranian pilgrims had been absent. Earlier, the Saudi-owned Al-Hayat newspaper reported on December 30, 2016 that Saudi Pilgrimage Minister Mohammed Bantin had opened discussions with more than 80 countries, including Iran, on arrangements for the 2017 Haj. Negotiations for Iranian pilgrims to join 2016 Haj broke down over questions of where their visas should be issued and how their security could be ensured following the deaths of 464 Iranian pilgrims in a stampede at the 2015 Haj.

- According to the *ISNA* and *Fars* news agencies on January 8, former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani died in hospital after suffering a heart attack.

On January 10, thousands of Iranians gathered in central Tehran for his funeral. Rafsanjani was a pivotal figure in the foundation of the Islamic republic in 1979, and served as president from 1989 to 1997. A confidant of Khomeini, Rafsanjani was the speaker of parliament for two consecutive terms until Khomeini’s death in 1989. His presidency was marked by reconstruction, cautious reform and repairs to Iran’s relations with its Arab neighbours. Rafsanjani emerged as a moderate counter-figure to the ultra-hardliners clustered around Ahmadinejad under whom Iran’s relations with the West plummeted. He also criticised the crackdown that followed Ahmadinejad’s disputed re-election in 2009. Rafsanjani’s policies of economic liberalisation and

better relations with the West attracted fierce supporters and equally fierce critics during his life. He had also supported the deal Rouhani struck with world powers for sanctions to be lifted in exchange for curbs on Iran's nuclear programme.

Iraq

- During his one-day visit to Iraq on January 2, French President Francois Hollande met with French forces helping Iraq in the fight against Daesh and held talks with top officials.

French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian accompanied President Hollande. Hollande remains the most prominent head of state to visit Iraq since the launch of a US-led coalition against the armed groups. While addressing French troops stationed in Iraq, Hollande said he was hoping for 'a year of victory against terrorism'. He also said, "Taking action against terrorism, here in Iraq, is also preventing acts of terrorism on our own soil." France is the second-largest contributor to the US-led coalition, which has carried out thousands of air strikes against Daesh in Iraq and Syria and provided military equipment, training and advice to Iraqi forces. France has around 500 troops fighting alongside coalition forces in Iraq, and being supported by Rafale fighter jets.

- On January 2, at least 36 people were killed after a suicide bomber driving a pickup loaded with explosives struck a busy market in Baghdad.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack in an online statement on their website. The attack took place in Sadr City, a vast Shia district in eastern Baghdad that has been repeatedly targeted by Sunni extremists since the 2003 US-led invasion.

Israel

- On January 8, The Israeli embassy in London apologised after one of its staff members was caught on camera threatening to 'take down' a British government minister.

Earlier on January 8, the Mail had posted a footage showing the embassy's senior political officer, Shai Masot, telling an undercover reporter from Al-Jazeera television, "I want to take down... the Deputy Foreign Minister (Alan Duncan)." Duncan is British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's second in-command, and a long-time critic of Israel. Masot said Duncan was creating "a lot of problems." Duncan has referred to Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory as a "stain on the face of the globe" calling them an "act of theft". In 2014, he told the BBC, "Occupation, annexation, illegality, negligence, complicity this is a wicked cocktail which brings shame on Israel." Masot also called Johnson an 'idiot' and mocked 'crazy' opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his 'weirdo' supporters. The Israeli embassy issued an

immediate apology, saying it 'rejects the remarks concerning minister Duncan, which are completely unacceptable'.

Palestine

- On January 15, delegates from 70 countries, including key European and Arab states as well as the permanent members of the UN Security Council, gathered in Paris for the Middle East peace Summit in an attempt to restart the peace talks between Israel and Palestine.

A statement was released at the end of the Summit which urged both sides to steer clear of unilateral steps, stressing that the basis for peace talks should be the 1967 borders, before Israel commenced its occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds. Both Israel and Palestine were not invited to attend the Summit. US Secretary of State John Kerry said his team insisted on language in the communique which condemned Palestinian attacks on Israel, making it more "balanced". He had spoken to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reassure him that any proposal following on from the conference at the UNSC would be opposed by the US. Israel had been concerned that the conference might set the terms for a final agreement and seek to get it adopted at the UN. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) welcomed the closing statement of the Summit which stressed the need to end the Israeli occupation. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed the international conference in Paris as "futile." He said, "It was coordinated between the French and the Palestinians with the aim of imposing upon Israel conditions that are incompatible with our national needs." The presence and the expansion of the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories have been among the main reasons behind the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian talks. Israel has defied international calls to stop its unauthorised construction activities in the occupied lands.

- On January 14, Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas inaugurated a Palestinian embassy to the Vatican. He also warned that moving the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem would 'not help the peace process'.

Abbas held a private meeting with Pope Francis before the inaugurate of the diplomatic mission. Speaking briefly to reporters, Abbas reiterated his opposition to the possible transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem, pledged by US President-elect Donald Trump. On January 13, in an interview with French daily Le Figaro, Abbas said the Palestinians might consider 'reversing recognition' of Israel if Trump moved the US embassy to Jerusalem. Trump promised during the election campaign to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move the American embassy there. Such a step would be a break with US policy, and with most of the international community, over the status of Jerusalem. The Vatican has long held that a two-state solution was the best road to peace in the Holy Land, and the Pope has taken steps to raise the profile of a Palestinian state by formally recognising Palestinian statehood in a legal document in May

2015. The Vatican, in November 2012, referred to Palestine as a State when the UN voted to recognise it as a non-member observer.

Syria

- On January 14, at least 30 regime fighters and jihadists were killed after Daesh launched an assault on the besieged Syrian city of Deir Ezzor.

The brutal attack came as the political opposition said it supported the upcoming peace talks in the Kazakh capital Astana. The negotiations will attempt to bring an end to the war. Daesh used suicide attacks, rockets and tunnel bombs killing at least 12 government forces and two civilians in Deir Ezzor. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 20 jihadists were killed in air raids by Syrian and allied warplanes on the city, where around 200,000 people have lived under Daesh siege since early 2015. According to Observatory head, Rami Abdel Rahman, the attack was the 'most violent' assault mounted by Daesh on the city in more than a year.

- Dawn reported on January 13 that international investigators have said for the first time that they suspect President Bashar al-Assad and his brother are responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict.
- On January 13, the US censured 18 senior officials of the Syrian government and imposed sanctions on a Syrian organisation, over its use of chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

This is the first time the US has sanctioned specific Syrian officials in connection with the country's alleged violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and a UN Security Council resolution prohibiting chemical weapons. The sanctions also referred to recent reports by the OPCW and United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, alleging the Syrian government had used chlorine in 2014 and 2015. In a separate statement, the US State Department announced sanctions on a Syrian entity, the Organisation for Technological Industries (OTI), which, it claimed, was involved in making ballistic missiles capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The announcement referred to a June 26, 2012 address of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in which he had identified the OTI as an agency of the Syrian Ministry of Defence. The State Department claimed that the OTI's primary mission was to import advanced strategic technologies for surface-to-surface missile and surface-to-surface rocket programmes in Syria. The statement also said that the OTI was involved in furthering Syria's WMD-capable ballistic missile programme. Previous reports of the joint inquiry by the UN and OPCW had identified only military units and did not name any commanders or officials. Now a list has been produced of individuals including Assad, his younger brother Maher and other high-ranking figures indicating the decision to use toxic weapons came from the very top.

- On January 13, Syria accused Israel of firing missiles that landed near a major military base west of Damascus.

This attack was the third one reported in nearly six weeks to hit near the capital. In response, the Syrian government warned Israel of the repercussions of such attacks. But it refrained from saying whether it would retaliate. Damascus, preoccupied with the country's civil war, is unlikely to open a new front with Israel. Meanwhile, Israel has delivered the occasional message to Damascus by targeting shipments of weapons headed to the Lebanese Hezbollah group. There was no immediate comment from Israel to the Syrian claims of a strike. Israel is widely believed to have carried out a number of air strikes on advanced weapons systems in Syria including Russian-made anti-aircraft missiles and Iranian-made missiles, as well as Hezbollah positions.

- On January 13, Russian and Turkish military officials agreed to coordinate aerial attacks against the positions of foreign-sponsored militant groups in Syria, and signed a memorandum on combat flight safety during missions in Syrian airspace.

The Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement that the agreement, reached in Moscow during a meeting, specifies a course of action to avoid incidents during flights over Syrian airspace. Russia has been bombing Daesh and al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front terrorist groups in Syria at the official request of President Bashar al-Assad since September 30, 2015. On August 24, 2016, the Turkish air force and special ground forces started 'Operation Euphrates Shield' inside Syria in an attempt to support the Free Syrian Army militants and rid the border area of Daesh terrorists and fighters from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Democratic Union Party (PYD). The offensive was launched in coordination with the US-led military coalition.

- According to Syria's official news agency SANA on January 11, Syrian forces in Aleppo's recently retaken areas discovered Saudi-produced chemical weapons agents left behind by terrorists in the city.

The report said that the chemical materials were found by an army unit in a depot in the Old City of Aleppo. Sulphur, chlorine and raw materials used for plastic granules were among the discovered substances. It further noted that militants used the materials for manufacturing explosives that were later employed for targeting Aleppo's residential areas. Terrorist groups such as Daesh and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham have on several occasions used toxic materials to target civilians in the Aleppo areas. The Syrian government has accused Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey of providing banned weapons to the militants.

- On January 9, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad vowed to retake Wadi Barada region that supplies Damascus with water. He also rejected any negotiations on his departure at upcoming talks in Kazakhstan.

Millions of people have been without water for weeks after fighting damaged key infrastructure in the Wadi Barada region outside Damascus that is the main water source for the capital. The government says former Al Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front, known previously as Al-Nusra Front, is present in Wadi Barada, and blames rebels there for cutting water to Damascus since Dec 22, 2016. Assad's forces have been battling rebels in Wadi Barada for weeks and fighting

has continued despite the start of a nationwide ceasefire on December 30, 2016 brokered by Russia and Turkey. Assad said the ceasefire was being breached on a daily basis and mainly around Damascus because the terrorists occupy the main source of water in Wadi Barada. The rebels, however, deny that jihadists are in the area and say the water supply was severed after government strikes hit pumping facilities. According to the UN, 5.5 million people in and around Damascus are without water.

- On January 7, a tanker truck bomb in the rebel-held Syrian town of Azaz near the Turkish border killed at least 48 people.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 14 rebels were among the dead, but most of those killed were civilians, including five religious judges belonging to various rebel factions. Azaz has been repeatedly struck by bomb attacks. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, but Osama al-Merhi, a lawyer at the scene of the blast, pointed his finger at Daesh. The blast comes amid a fragile nationwide ceasefire Russia and Turkey, supporting the government and rebels respectively.

- On January 6, Russia's military said it has begun scaling down its deployment to Syria, as the regime intensified its bombardment of the rebel-held district of Wadi Barada.

Moscow's intervention in September 2015 helped President Bashar al-Assad, whose forces scored a major victory in December 2016 with the recapture of the opposition stronghold of east Aleppo. Russia's military said a naval group headed by aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov would leave the conflict zone under a drawdown ordered by President Vladimir Putin on December 29, 2016. According to Andrei Kartaplov, the Russian commander in Syria, aircrafts from the carrier had struck 1,252 terrorist targets during the two-month mission. The carrier arrived in November 2016 as Russia boosted its firepower on land and in the Mediterranean to support regime forces targeting Aleppo. Moscow had already announced a partial withdrawal of Russian forces in March 2016, but increased its presence again as fighting increased. Putin's latest announced drawdown coincided with the declaration of a ceasefire between government and rebel forces that has led to a decrease in fighting.

Turkey

- On January 12, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman criticised the US CENTCOM after it re-tweeted a statement by a Kurdish-dominated alliance it supports in Syria, saying it had no links to Kurdish militants fighting the Turkish state.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the main US partner on the ground in Syria in the fight against Daesh, includes the powerful Kurdish YPG militia. Turkey views the YPG as an extension of the PKK militant group, which has waged a three-decade long insurgency in Turkey and is considered a terrorist organisation by Ankara, the US and the EU. Turkey is hoping that

the incoming US administration under President-elect Donald Trump would re-think its policy in Syria and stop providing support to Kurdish militia fighters.

- On January 9, Turkey's parliament began debating a controversial new draft constitution aimed at expanding the powers of the Presidency under Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The new constitution, which would likely be put to a referendum by spring 2017, seeks to replace the basic law drawn up after Turkey's 1980 military coup. It would establish for the first time a presidential system for ruling the country. Critics have claimed the move is part of a power grab by Erdogan, Turkey's premier from 2003-2014 and then president in the wake of a failed coup in July 2016. Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), however, say a presidential system would bring Turkey in line with countries such as France and the US and is required for efficient government. Debates on the 18-article new constitution began after a parliamentary commission agreed to the draft.

- On January 7, Turkey ordered the dismissal of almost 8,400 civil servants and the closure of over 80 associations, including sports clubs, in the latest round of purges after the 2016 failed coup.

More than 100,000 people have already been suspended or sacked in a crackdown on those with alleged links to coup-plotters. According to three new decrees introduced in the aftermath of the coup, some 8,390 civil servants representing 63 different state institutions will lose their jobs. They include 2,687 police officers, 1,699 civil servants from the justice ministry, 838 health officials and hundreds of employees from other ministries. Another 631 academics and eight members of the Council of State have also been dismissed. The dismissals are authorised by the cabinet and require no parliamentary approval under the state of emergency, which has twice been extended and will remain in force until April 19, 2017. Its scope has been vehemently criticised by the EU and human rights activists.

Yemen

- On January 13, Yemeni armed forces engaged in heavy fighting against pro-Saudi militants near the strategic Bab al-Mandeb Strait in the southern part of the country.

Clashes broke out after Saudi mercenaries, backed by Riyadh's military aircraft, seized the al-Zabab region of southern Yemen and the heights overlooking the al-Amri military base in the area. According to latest reports, Saudi-backed militants are now advancing towards the areas near the Red Sea port city of Mokha. The Bab al-Mandab Strait is a narrow waterway separating the Arabian Peninsula from the Horn of Africa and links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. It is a key strategic channel for commerce and trade, with an estimated 4 % of global oil supply passing through it. The development comes even as Saudi fighter jets continue their deadly air raids against civilian targets in Yemen.

- According to *PressTv* on January 12, at least seven civilians were killed when Saudi military aircraft conducted a series of airstrikes against residential areas in Yemen.

Three women and four children were killed as Saudi fighter jets bombarded an area in the Bayt al-Faqih district of Yemen's western coastal province of Hudaydah. Yemeni forces and fighters from allied popular committees, in return, fired several rockets against the Alab border crossing in Saudi Arabia's southwestern border region of Asir, leaving many Saudi troopers and pro-Saudi militiamen dead and injured. According to Meritxell Relano, UNICEF representative in Yemen, almost 1,400 children have been killed and 2,140 injured as a result of the conflict in Yemen. She added that some 2,000 schools have been destroyed, damaged or used for military purposes or as shelters for displaced families. She added that UNICEF calls on all parties to the Yemen crisis to honour their obligations under international humanitarian law, and stop attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools.

---Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA

Pakistan

External

- On January 14, US Vice President Joe Biden warned that nuclear weapons in South Asia could be used in a regional conflict.

The outgoing US Vice President also said that Pakistan, along with Russia, North Korea and others is making “counterproductive moves” that exacerbate the threat of use of nuclear weapons in a regional conflict. He said that the Trump Administration would have to deal with these dangers. Strategic analysts also argue that escalating tensions between nuclear-armed Pakistan and India have increased the nuclear threat in the region. Washington has repeatedly raised its concerns with Pakistan on the development of its Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNW). Though Islamabad dismisses such concerns as misplaced and has warned that the world could not ignore India’s unprecedented arms build-up and remains firm in its position that it will not accept one-sided restrictions on its nuclear programme. Officials in Islamabad also maintain that the US-India nuclear deal has allowed New Delhi to increase its fissile material and has disturbed the strategic balance in South Asia. They stressed that Pakistan would “take whatever measures are necessary to maintain credible deterrence”. Earlier, in June 2016, Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhry, while briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Defence and Foreign Affairs, said that the US has been told clearly that there will be no compromise on Pakistan’s nuclear programme.

- On January 12, US defence secretary-designate, James Mattis said during his confirmation hearing at the US Senate Armed Forces Committee “If confirmed, I will work with the State Department and the Congress to incentivise Pakistan’s cooperation on issues critical to our national interests and the region’s security. He stressed that Pakistan “needs to expel or neutralise externally focused militant groups that operate within its borders.”

Defence Secretary-designate, James Mattis also told the Senate Committee that US ties with Pakistan has had “highs and lows,” and emphasised that he will rebuild the trust between Islamabad and Washington that is needed for an “effective partnership.” James Mattis also said that countries in the region “have the responsibility to support the reconciliation process” in Afghanistan, adding that the neighbouring states “should increase pressure on the Afghan Taliban and associated militant networks” to stop their campaigns of violence. He praised Pakistan for its efforts to combat “internally-focused” militants and acknowledged that its military has suffered “significant casualties in this counterinsurgency effort.” Pak-US relations fell to their lowest point during President Obama’s tenure in the Oval office even as the two sides failed to reduce the trust deficit, particularly over the crisis in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan has expressed a desire to strengthen its bilateral relations with the incoming Trump Administration. Pakistan’s envoy in the US, Jalil Abbas Jilani said on January 14, 2017 that

there are hopes that “Pak-US cooperation could be further strengthened in the fight against terrorism by revisiting sale of F-16s and Coalition Fund issues.”

- On January 13, Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, Nafees Zakaria strongly rejected US allegations of the existence of terrorist safe havens in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and recalled that Pakistan has lost thousands of its citizens and suffered economic losses of over \$100 billion due to terrorism.

Earlier on January 10, US State Department spokesman, Mark Toner accused Pakistan of providing safe havens to terrorists in FATA. Toner also said that the terrain and the military’s tactical limitations prevent Islamabad from eliminating all terrorist safe havens. The allegations were made immediately after an Afghan government spokesman said that the terrorists target Afghanistan because Pakistan allows them to maintain safe havens in FATA. Afghanistan’s accusations follows a series of suicide bombings in Afghanistan on January 10, 2017. A demonstration was also held outside the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul to protest against Islamabad’s alleged ‘support for terrorist groups’. Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson, reacting to the accusations, stressed that Pakistan does not allow its territory to be used for attacks against any other country and noted that Afghanistan was infested with many terrorist organisations due to instability in the country. The spokesperson also expressed “deep concerns” over the nexus between Indian RAW and Afghanistan’s NDS and added “some foreign elements are exploiting the situation and using Afghan soil against Pakistan.” Afghan and the US officials continue to blame Pakistan as the security situation worsens in Afghanistan with stepped up insurgent attacks across the country. Pakistan insists that it is making serious efforts for bringing peace in Afghanistan and cannot be blamed for the violence.

- During his visit to Pakistan on January 9, General John Nicholson, Commander of the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) and US forces in Afghanistan met with Pakistan’s Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa. During the meeting, the two sides discussed border security mechanisms and the security situation in Afghanistan.

General Bajwa appreciated the role of the RSM forces for maintaining peace and stability in Afghanistan. He however, emphasised the importance of a bilateral security mechanism for the Pak-Afghan border, stressing that the RSM could play an important role. Pakistan has long been insisting on effective border management between Pakistan and Afghanistan for monitoring illegal cross-border movement.

- On January 7, Pakistan’s Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif confirmed that the former Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), General (retired) Raheel Sharif had been appointed as the top commander of the Saudi-led 39-nation Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT). Later on he withdrew this statement causing confusion.

The defence minister then informed the Senate on January 11 that the former army chief, General Raheel Sharif has not sought a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the government to take on any new role. The statement contradicts his earlier remarks in which he had said that the

decision was taken in consultation with both the Army's General Headquarters (GHQ) and the government. General (ret'd) Sharif retired from his post as Pakistan's army chief in November 2016 and is credited for launching operation Zarb-e- Azb that led to a significant decrease in militancy in the country.

- According to *Radio Pakistan* on January 7, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Maleeha Lodhi, delivered a dossier on India's interference and terrorism in Pakistan, to the new UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Pakistan has also asked the UN to restrain India from interfering in Pakistan. The dossier contains evidence of India's intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing's (RAW) interference in Pakistan and its involvement in terrorism particularly in Balochistan, FATA and Karachi. Pakistan accuses India of destabilising the country by sponsoring terrorism on its territory and aiding separatist groups in Balochistan. In March 2016, Pakistani security forces had arrested Jhadav, a serving Indian naval officer and an operative of India's intelligence agency RAW. Jhadav confessed that he was promoting unrest in Balochistan and Karachi and had been working with Baloch insurgents and terrorist organisations. The dossier also contains video evidences of an Indian submarine's attempted violation of the Pakistani maritime boundary.

- On January 5, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa dismissed claims by his Indian counterpart about the so-called surgical strikes, calling his assertion 'self-defeating'.

General Qamar Javed Bajwa, also cautioned that Pakistan was ready to tackle India's 'aggression'. The statement by General Bajwa follows a recent comment by Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat who said that surgical strikes against Pakistan were meant to send out a message and that further strikes could not be ruled out.

- On January 5, US Secretary of State, John Kerry noted in an exit memo that Pakistan was among the key countries where the United States has constructed state-of-the-art tactical security operations centres.

Kerry also named Afghanistan and Iraq among the countries where the Obama Administration has built such centres. Later the US State Department spokesman, Mark Toner said they were based inside United States embassies worldwide to "monitor worldwide activity".

- During his address to an International Parliamentary Seminar on Kashmir held in Islamabad on January 5, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said the world needs to tell India "enough is enough" with regard to its policy towards the freedom movement in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).

The Premier termed Kashmir an integral part of Pakistan and the country's core dispute with India. He urged the international community to implement the UNSC resolutions on Kashmir and reiterated Pakistan's support for the struggle of Kashmiris for their right to self-

determination. PM Sharif also recalled his four-point agenda presented at the UNGA in September 2015. Sharif's four points included respecting the 2003 ceasefire in Kashmir and at the Line of Control (LoC), restraining threat of use of force, demilitarisation of Kashmir and troops withdrawal from Siachen. Moreover, the Prime Minister stressed that Pakistan's position had strengthened the Kashmir cause with the international community now asking India to discuss the dispute. Pakistan has long urged global cooperation for a resolution of the Kashmir dispute. It also insists that India's deployment of more than 1 million troops in IOK remains a major obstacle in implementing various UN resolutions on Kashmir.

- On January 3, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif chaired a high-level meeting in Islamabad to review Pakistan's relations with its neighbours and strategic partners. The participants of the meeting included both the civilian and military leadership.

According to the Prime Minister's Office, the meeting "evaluated various policy options" in response to multiple challenges in foreign relations, while the premier emphasised regional economic integration and 'peaceful coexistence' among the South Asian countries. PM Sharif termed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) the centrepiece of the country's quest for regional integration. The meeting comes at a time when tensions are high between Pakistan and India over Kashmir and Indian PM Modi has threatened to renege on the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), a water-sharing pact that was signed between India and Pakistan in 1960 facilitated by the World Bank. Following the threat, analysts suggested that Modi's war-like rhetoric would further threaten the already fragile peace in South Asia.

- On January 1, Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesman, Nafees Zakaria criticised India's move to ban Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar at the UNSC 1267 Sanctions Committee, terming it a 'politically motivated proposal' aimed at "masking its own terrorist activities in Pakistan."

Zakaria said India's proposal had "no merit and was primarily aimed at advancing its narrow national agenda." The Spokesman also added that India was employing terrorism as an instrument of state policy and also remains "involved in perpetrating, sponsoring, supporting, and financing terrorism." The strong reaction came soon after India's proposal in the UN to list the JeM chief, Masood Azhar as an UN-designated terrorist. India accuses Masood Azhar for masterminding the January 2016 attack on its airbase in Pathankot. The move against Azhar in the UN was blocked by China which cited lack of "consensus" on the issue. Earlier in October 2016, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, Li Baodong in a veiled reference to India had also warned that no country should use counter-terrorism as a tool for "political gains".

Pakistan

Internal

- According to *The News* on January 12, at least five right activists went missing from various cities in Pakistan between January 4 and January 7, 2017.

Human Rights Watch has asked Pakistan to urgently investigate the abductions saying their disappearance raises concerns of government involvement. Pakistan's Interior Ministry said that it will investigate the disappearance of one of those individuals, Salman Haider, but made no reference to the others. Meanwhile the US has also expressed serious concern over the missing activists.

- On January 11, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif inaugurated the restoration of an ancient Hindu temple complex in Punjab.

In a ceremony attended by minority leaders, Sharif lamented those who use "strange interpretations" of Islam to preach hate against other religions. Non-Muslims make up only about three percent of Pakistan's estimated 190 million population.

India

- *The Nation* reported on January 6 that India has urged the World Bank to allow a neutral expert for resolving a dispute with Pakistan over the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) as well plans by India to construct two hydel power projects.

The development follows a meeting between World Bank representative, Ian Solomon and officials of India's External Affairs and Water Resources Ministries in New Delhi. However, Pakistan has rejected suggestions by India for appointing a neutral expert and instead seeks a full court of arbitration maintaining that the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) can only be saved by arbitration. There are concerns in Pakistan over two hydroelectric power plants, the Kishanganga and Ratle that India is constructing on the Indus river system. Pakistan made it explicit that it would not accept any modifications in the IWT after Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesman, Vikas Swarup said the implementation of the IWT includes "the redressal of the technical questions and differences," adding that, "We believe that these consultations should be given adequate time." Pakistan is worried that India is gaining more time to complete the two disputed projects and would insist later that since the projects are already complete, they could no longer be modified.

- *The Hindu* reported on January 14, that Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat accused Pakistan for "disturbing the secular fabric of the country through continued proxy war," and said that the army is prepared to go the extra mile to ensure safety of the people and their properties.

- In a related development on January 6, Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat said during a televised interview that the “ColdStart doctrine exists for conventional military operations.”

It is for the first time that any senior official in India has publically acknowledged the existence of the ColdStart doctrine. The ColdStart doctrine envisaged a rapid deployment of Indian forces along Pakistan’s borders in case of any terrorist attack planned from Pakistan. Moreover, it also involves swift infiltration of Indian armed forces into parts of Pakistan’s territory within a short span of time. Pakistan insists that this Doctrine exacerbates Pakistan’s threat perception. India in recent years has invested heavily to operationalise the ColdStart doctrine and has developed cantonments along the international border with Pakistan.

- During his visit to India on January 8, France’s Foreign Affairs and International Development Minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss the two countries bilateral relationship.

Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Vikas Swaroop said that Ayrault and Modi reaffirmed the close strategic partnership between the two countries and deliberated upon several issues including bilateral relations in defence and international terrorism. Meanwhile, the French Minister said that India and Europe are both victims of terror and can meet the challenge by cooperating. Moreover, Ayrault emphasised that India has various defence needs adding that the country needs submarines and helicopters.

Afghanistan

- On January 10, two suicide blasts near the Afghan parliament in Kabul killed at least 45 people and wounded 80 others.
- In a related development on January 10, a suicide blast at the compound of Kandahar’s governor in southern Afghanistan killed five UAE citizens including four diplomats.

Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the Kabul attacks saying the victims were mostly Afghan intelligence agents. The Taliban, however, denied the Kandahar attack. Following the attacks, an Afghan government spokesman alleged that Pakistan had allowed terrorists to maintain safe havens in its Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Moreover, US State Department spokesman, Mark Toner also backed Kabul’s claim that the existence of safe havens in FATA allowed terrorists to carry out attacks inside Afghanistan. However, Pakistan’s Foreign Office strongly rejected the allegations. The security situation in Afghanistan has worsened in the last two years after international forces announced their withdrawal from the country. A recent report by the US government’s Special Inspector General for Afghanistan, noted that Afghan security forces are not fully capable of securing the country.

- On January 12, a US military report concluded that 33 Afghan civilians were killed in American air strikes in the Afghan province of Kunduz in November 2016.

According to a US military statement, the investigation “determined, regretfully, that 33 civilians were killed and 27 wounded” as troops responded to fire from “Taliban who were using civilian houses as firing positions”. Following the raid, Afghan authorities urged the US to compensate the victims’ families.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

UNITED NATIONS

- On January 10, during his first formal briefing to the Security Council, UN Secretary-General António Guterres underlined the need for renewed efforts to build and sustain peace ranging from prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and sustainable development.

He said, “We spend far more time and resources responding to crises rather than preventing them. People are paying too high a price, we need a whole new approach.” He also mentioned that it has been difficult to persuade decision-makers at both the national and international levels that prevention must remain their priority. Guterres indicated that the UN’s response to challenges has remained fragmented and hence changes are required in order to rebalance the approach towards peace and security. He said the UN has responded to conflicts for decades and it now needs to do more to prevent war and sustain peace. He also informed the Council members on reform initiatives within the UN Secretariat, in particular with regard to the decision-making process.

- On January 6, the UN’s International Organisation for Migration (IOM) released its preliminary figures reporting that a large number of migrants had been killed while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe during 2016.

According to the figures, at least 363,348 people had crossed the sea mostly into Italy and Greece and an additional 5,079 people were either killed or are missing. IOM Director General William Lacy Swing called for finding creative means to permit safe, legal and secure migration which could be done through work visas, family reunification or temporary protected status. He said that the IOM has also initiated first aid training courses in Libya for rescuers. The courses involve lifesaving operations in the Mediterranean Sea.

- On January 4, the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) condemned a deadly ambush on its convoy in the south-eastern part of the country which killed two peace-keeping soldiers.

Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in the country, stated that every effort would be made to track down those who are responsible and to bring them to justice. An attack on a peacekeeper constitutes a war crime. He said, “No claim can justify that individuals direct their grievances against peacekeepers whose presence in the country has no other objective than to help in ending the violence.” According to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in CAR (MINUSCA), the convoy was heading to the city when unknown insurgents surprised them by killing two peacekeepers, and escaping into the bush. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained unstable

owing to clashes between the Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, who are mostly Christian. The country of 4.5 million people has experienced civil conflict since 2013.

- January 1, António Guterres formally succeeded Ban Ki-moon as Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Ban Ki Moon served the organisation from 2007 until December 31, 2016. The UN General Assembly elected Guterres on October 13, 2016. He will serve for a five-year term until December 31, 2021. He was Prime Minister of Portugal from 1995 to 2002, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from June 2005 to December 2015. On his first day at the UN as Secretary-General, Guterres pledged to make 2017 a year for peace. He said “On this New Year’s Day, I ask all of you to join me in making one shared New Year's resolution: Let us resolve to put peace first.” He also called on the entire UN for a collective effort to address the shortcomings of the organisation.

--- Moiz Khan