

May 16 – May 31

AREA BRIEF

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Area Briefs: 16-31 May 2017

General Observations

Pakistan

- The Summit in KSA on 21 May, between US President Trump, the Saudi leadership and representatives of 55 Muslim states who are partners in a KSA-led military coalition ostensibly to fight terrorism, aggravated fissures prevailing within the Muslim World as it became evident that this military alliance was more to “isolate Iran” than combat terrorism. President Trump made clear that he expected this from the alliance and the Saudi King also spoke of the “threat” from Iran. For Pakistan staying in such an alliance has already become controversial within the country, as there are fears that this will aggravate the sectarian divides within the country. The government had to reiterate that it would not be party to any alliance targeting Iran but it has maintained an ambivalent approach to membership of the alliance.
- The KSA Summit was also an embarrassment for the Sharif government as Trump failed to mention Pakistan when referring to various countries that had suffered from terrorism; nor was PM Sharif allowed to address the Summit while some other leaders were allowed to address the Summit.
- Pakistan also suffered a setback at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), mid May, because of its lack of proper preparedness, as it appeared before the Court after India filed a case to counter the death sentence awarded to Indian spymaster Jadhav by a Pakistani field court martial. The ICJ restrained Pakistan from executing convicted Indian spy Kulbhashan Jadhav until a final verdict. That the Government of Pakistan failed to make its case against provisional measures at the International Court of Justice hearing on Kulbhashan Jadhav is now accepted in most political and legal circles. Four glaring errors stand out:

One, the failure to register the 2008 Bilateral Agreement on Consular Access between Pakistan and India with the UN Secretariat in accordance with Article 102 of the UN Charter led to its inadmissibility as a cogent argument before the Court. That the Government rushed to register the 2008 Agreement three days after the hearing (on 18th May 2017) was recognition of this failure. It is shocking to find that the Foreign Office was either unaware or entirely negligent in failing to register this 2008 Agreement immediately after its signing.

Two, Pakistan’s legal team was weak, with one QC who specializes in international commercial law and arbitration, and a young barrister, inexperienced in the field of international law, from the Attorney General’s Office. To make matters worse, their lack

of expertise in this particular area led to their inability to utilize the full 90 minutes allotted to them. The fact is that even a new lawyer in the field is well aware that each minute given to him/her to speak before the Court is given for a reason. Time matters, and when 90 minutes had been given, the ICJ had granted this time for a particular reason. To not make use of every second of that time to present Pakistan's case was an arrogant blunder on the part of Pakistan's counsel who couldn't distinguish between a "rant" and extensively laying out Pakistan's position and case.

Three, there was poorly devised strategy, either on the part of the Foreign Office or the counsel itself, or perhaps both, as to how to proceed before the Court. It was abundantly clear that Pakistan's legal counsel was arguing both on jurisdiction and merits of the case at a stage when it should only have argued on jurisdiction. The focus should have solely been on why the ICJ does not have the jurisdiction to grant provisional measures in this case, and how the core Indian contention pertaining to "urgency" was mere fabrication to invoke the jurisdiction of the Court.

Four, showing a lack of overall competence and preparation was the fact that Pakistan failed to appoint an *ad hoc* judge. While this does not affect the legal standing or merits of Pakistan's case, the political ramifications of the same have been disastrous for Pakistan. At the end of the day, the reality is that the case has a crucial political dimension, as do many cases before the ICJ.

- Pakistan-US relations continued to nosedive with the US State Department's budget proposals for fiscal year 2018 reflecting a major cut in funds for Pakistan. Not only has the amount been drastically reduced, the Trump Administration wants the funds to be in the shape of a loan rather than a grant. In addition, there are many in the US Congress who want the US to intervene militarily into Pakistan to contain the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan.
- In Indian Occupied Kashmir India upped the military ante by enforcing a curfew in parts of IOL on 28 May as protests gathered momentum in the wake of the killing of another leader of Hizb ul Mujahideen, Sabzar Bhat. India also blocked all internet and mobile services in IOK in an attempt to black out news of the protests.
- On the domestic political front, the political battles between the government and the opposition parties became more acute with the scheduled appearances of the PM's sons before the Panama-related JIT.

International

- The UK suffered a major terrorist attack on 22 May, when a music concert in Manchester was targeted by a suicide bomber – a British citizen of Libyan descent – Salman Abedi. At least 22 people were killed, including children.
- President Trump began his first overseas visit since coming into the White House when he arrived in KSA on 20 May. He signed an arms deal worth \$ 110 billion with Saudi Arabia as part of a massive set of trade deals between the two countries – with the total value of the deals being \$ 400 billion. Included in the arms deals are weapons systems that the Obama Administration had refused to sell to KSA, including missile defence systems.
- Trump also addressed the members of the KSA-led military alliance identifying it as a means of isolating Iran. King Salman of Saudi Arabia presented Donald Trump with the Kingdom’s top civilian honour.
- While Trump and KSA were seeking to isolate Iran, the Iranian people re-elected Hassan Rouhain as President on 20 May, by an overwhelming majority – signaling Iran’s desire to engage with the world.
- On 29 May, China warned India to exercise “restraint” on its infrastructure building in the disputed region of Arunachal Pradesh. India has built a bridge connecting Assam to Arunachal Pradesh, which would allow for a rapid movement of troops.
- Israel-India defence cooperation intensified with Israel’s state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) signing a deal with India worth \$630 million to provide air and missile defence systems to the Indian Navy.
- The UN Conference on Eliminating Nuclear Weapons published a first draft of the proposed Treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons. None of the nuclear weapons states attended the Conference.
- Afghanistan saw a rise in terrorist attacks in the last fortnight of May with a major attack on 31 May in Kabul’s diplomatic area – a heavily protected part of the Capital. 80 people were killed and more than 350 wounded with many embassies suffering damage. The Afghan Taliban immediately denied any role in this attack.

- With the Nuclear Suppliers Group Summit in June, China once again made its position on the membership issue relating to Pakistan and India known. China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hua Chunying, on 22 May, again reiterated that China would oppose India's unilateral entry into the NSG.

--- Dr Shireen M Mazari

Director General

AMERICAS

Domestic

- Jeremy Joseph Christian, a suspect accused of fatally stabbing two people on a train in Oregon appeared in court on May 30.
- On May 26, assailant Jeremy Joseph Christian stabbed to death two passengers aboard a Portland, Oregon, commuter train when they tried to stop him from harassing two young women who appeared to be Muslim.

A 35 year old convicted felon, Christian is facing charges of murder, attempted murder, intimidation, and possession of a weapon. During his brief appearance in court, he shouted slogans such as “You call it terrorism. I call it patriotism.” He could also be heard shouting “Death to the enemies of America.” President Donald Trump tweeted that the attack was “unacceptable.” Christian's background of extremist ideology is being investigated. At a rally in Portland on April 29, 2017 police confiscated a baseball bat he had allegedly been using to threaten liberal protesters. Christian was also filmed performing a Nazi salute, and shouting racial epithets while wearing an American flag as a cape. On his Facebook page he has praised Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and posted a death threat against Hillary Clinton.

- On May 30, Mike Dubke resigned from his position as the White House communications director three months after being appointed.

An experienced Republican strategist, Dubke was hired in March 2017 to overhaul the White House media strategy. Under the proposed reshuffle White House press secretary Sean Spicer will continue in his position but there will be fewer media briefings. The changes follow reports of disarray in the White House communications team. According to observers the resignation is the first in what could be a larger White House shake-up. There are rumours of further reorganisation too, lending credence to earlier reports that the President views his Administration's ongoing difficulties as “a messaging problem, and not one of policies or management.”

- On May 30, President Donald Trump's lawyer Michael Cohen received requests for information from two congressional panels investigating alleged Russian political meddling.

Cohen told US media that he had been asked to “provide information and testimony” about contacts he had with the Kremlin. Cohen said he turned down the request because it was “overly broad” and “not capable of being answered.” Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner has also been

named in the Russia probe. Kushner has been accused of discussing a back channel line of communication with Moscow's envoy to Washington during a December 2016 meeting. White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer refused to comment on whether Kushner had tried to set up such a secretive mode of contact. The inquiry into Russia's alleged interference in the US election and the Trump campaign's alleged involvement is threatening to consume Trump's "fledgling" presidency.

- On May 26, a US federal appeals court refused to lift a temporary block on President Donald Trump's revised travel ban.

The Virginia-based court said the President's broad immigration power was "not absolute" and the ban "intended to bar Muslims from this country." It upheld a lower Maryland court ruling that found the ban in violation of constitutional rights. The Justice Department said it would now seek a Supreme Court review of the appeals verdict. According to Attorney General Jeff Sessions the verdict thwarted Trump's effort to protect US national security. Trump's revised executive order would have placed a temporary ban on people from six mainly Muslim countries and the refugee programme.

- On May 23, the White House unveiled a \$4.1tr budget.

The plan has proposed slashing food stamps, reducing healthcare and disability benefits for low-income patients, and eliminating student loan subsidies. It also features an Ivanka Trump plan for paid parental leave. The US military would receive a 10% boost while \$1.6bn has been allocated for a wall on the border with Mexico. The budget has been titled A New Foundation for American Greatness. According to Mick Mulvaney, the White House budget director, the proposal is "simply the President's priorities put on paper."

- According to a Reuters poll on May 19, public approval of President Donald Trump dropped to its lowest level since his inauguration. Trump has been accused of mishandling classified information and meddling with an FBI investigation.

According to the poll 38% of adults approved of Trump while 56% did not. The remaining 6% had "mixed feelings." Americans have seemingly "soured on Trump" due to increasing concerns about his Administration's ties to Russia.

- Reuters reported on May 17 that US arrests of suspected illegal immigrants rose by nearly 40% in the first 100 days of Donald Trump's Presidency.

The acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Thomas Homan said that arrests by his agency jumped to 41,318 between January 22, 2017 and the end of April 2017 - up

from 30,028 arrests in roughly the same period during 2016. Of those arrested almost two-thirds had criminal convictions. There was also a jump of more than 150% in the number of immigrants not convicted of further crimes arrested by ICE.

International

- According to media reports on May 31, US President Donald Trump is poised to pull the country out of the Paris climate accord.

The 2015 Paris Accord united most of the world in a single agreement to mitigate climate change. It was signed by 195 countries out of 197 in a UN group on climate change, with Syria and Nicaragua abstaining. In a tweet on May 31, 2017, Trump said he would announce his decision within the “next few days.”

- Quoting US officials on May 31, the *BBC* reported that the US has for the first time successfully tested its defence system against an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

The test comes amid increasing tensions with North Korea. MDA Director Vice Admiral Jim Syring called the test a ‘critical milestone’. “This system is vitally important to the defence of our homeland, and this test demonstrates that we have a capable, credible deterrent against a very real threat,” he said. The test was the first live-fire test against a simulated ICBM for the Ground-Based Missile Defense (GMD).

- According to *Reuters* on May 29, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declined a request to host an event to mark Islam's holy month of Ramazan, breaking with a two-decade-old bipartisan tradition.

For almost twenty years, Republican and Democratic secretaries of state have hosted either an iftar dinner to break the day's fast during Ramazan or a reception marking the Eid al-Fitr holiday at the end of the month. Tillerson however turned down a request from the State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs to host an Eid al-Fitr reception as part of Ramazan celebrations.

- On May 28, US Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly said he might extend the laptop ban to all international flights entering or leaving the country.

According to the International Air Transport Association about 4,300 international flights take off and land in the US each day, carrying 560,000 passengers. This adds up to more than 200 million passengers annually. According to US authorities the laptop ban for the 10 Middle Eastern and

African airports was put in place because of intelligence suggesting terrorists could hide explosives in larger electronic devices.

- *NY Times* reported on May 20 that the Chinese government systematically dismantled CIA spying operations in the country starting in 2010, killing or imprisoning more than a dozen sources over two years and crippling intelligence gathering there for years afterward.

According to current and former American officials the intelligence breach was one of the worst in decades. It resulted in efforts by US intelligence and law enforcement agencies to contain the fallout, but investigators remained divided over the cause. Some were convinced that a mole within the CIA had betrayed the United States. Others believed that the Chinese had hacked the covert system the CIA used to communicate with its foreign sources.

- According to media reports on May 18, Robert Mueller, a former FBI boss has been named special counsel to oversee an inquiry into Russia's alleged meddling in the election and any Trump campaign ties.

The appointment has been widely praised by politicians from both sides. Calls for a special prosecutor had increased since President Donald Trump fired FBI director, James Comey. The FBI and Congress are looking into potential links between Trump's campaign team and Russia. US intelligence agencies believe Moscow tried to tip the election in favour of Trump.

- On May 18, Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed US media allegations that President Trump had passed on classified information to Russian officials.

Trump met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak at the White House on May 10, 2017, a day after he dismissed Comey from his post. According to the US media, Trump passed on classified information to the Russian officials. However Putin dismissed the allegations. He also said if he were requested to do so, he would release a record of the meeting to Congress. The news comes amid reports that Trump tried to influence an investigation into his team's links with Russia. Quoting a memo by former FBI Director James Comey, US media said that Trump had asked Comey to drop an inquiry into links between his ex-National Security Adviser Michael Flynn and Moscow. The fallout from both issues continues to consume Washington, amid increasing calls to set up an independent commission. Meanwhile addressing US Coast Guard Academy graduates in Connecticut, Trump said, "No politician in history has been treated worse or more unfairly."

- According to *NY Times* on May 17 President Trump asked FBI director, James B. Comey, to shut down the federal investigation into his former national security adviser, Michael T. Flynn.

The alleged request was made during an Oval Office meeting in February 2017, according to a memo Comey wrote after the meeting. "I hope you can let this go," the President told Comey, according to the memo. The documentation of Trump's request is the clearest evidence that the President tried to directly influence the Justice Department and FBI investigation into links between Trump's associates and Russia. Representative Jason Chaffetz, the Republican Chairman of the House Oversight Committee, demanded that the FBI submit "memoranda, notes, summaries and recordings" of discussions between Trump and Comey.

- *BBC* reported on May 17 that US soldier Chelsea Manning has been released from military prison.

Manning served seven years of a 35-year sentence for leaking hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables and military files to Wikileaks. Most of her sentence was commuted by then-US President Barack Obama in January 2017. In a statement issued through the American Civil Liberties Union, which provided her with legal support, Manning said, "After another anxious four months of waiting, the day has finally arrived I am looking forward to so much!" A US Army spokesperson confirmed that she left Fort Leavenworth military prison in Kansas.

- On May 17, Israel said its ties with the US had not been damaged by claims that President Donald Trump gave Russia sensitive information provided by Israeli intelligence.

Ron Dermer, Israel's ambassador to the US said, "Israel has full confidence in our intelligence-sharing relationship with the United States." The White House did not comment on reports that Israel was the source of the intelligence. According to media reports Trump had shared information that was passed on by a partner who had not given permission. The incident allegedly happened during a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the White House. Although not illegal, Trump's "alleged gaffe is seen as a breach of trust by many in the US intelligence community." Leading Republicans and Democrats have voiced concerns over what was said, with top Senate Democrat leader Chuck Schumer calling for the transcripts to be released by the White House. The US Senate Intelligence Committee has also asked for copies of any notes taken during the meeting.

- On May 16, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan met his US counterpart President Donald Trump.

Erdogan said his country would not accept Syrian Kurdish fighters in the region. He however stopped short of directly criticising the US decision to arm Kurdish fighters in Syria. During the White House meeting, Trump lauded Erdogan as an important ally in the “fight against terrorism.” Trump “did not mention Erdogan’s domestic crackdown after last year’s failed coup attempt.” According to observers, the meeting was very positive considering the tensions over Washington’s decision to arm the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia that Ankara regards as an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Latin America

- On May 30, the Colombian government and the FARC rebel group agreed to give rebel fighters more time to disarm.

In a televised speech, President Juan Manuel Santos said the group had been granted an extra 20 days. Under a peace agreement signed in 2016 all weapons had to be surrendered to the UN by May 30, 2017. FARC commanders had argued that they could not meet the original deadline because of delays in building special camps to house demobilised fighters. The deal was reached after four years of talks in Cuba and involved about 7,000 fighters in 26 transition zones.

- On May 18, Brazilian President Michel Temer denied a newspaper report that he approved payments to silence a possible witness in a corruption inquiry.

Temer was accused of authorising illicit payments to Eduardo Cunha, a jailed former speaker of the lower house of the Brazilian parliament. Cunha was sentenced to 15 years in prison for corruption, money laundering and tax evasion in March 2017.

---Amina Afzal

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On May 29, North Korea successfully test-fired a short-range ballistic missile into Japanese waters.

According to South Korean officials, the missile was a Scud-class ballistic missile that flew about 450 km reaching an altitude of 120 km. Japanese authorities also confirmed the launch and said the missile fell into the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), 370 km from its coast. North Korea's latest missile launch followed the two-day G7 Summit in Italy, held on May 26, 2017, where US President Donald Trump promised that the big problem of North Korea would be solved. In response to the launch, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, "As agreed during the G7 Summit, the North Korean problem is the international community's top priority. In order to deter North Korea, we will take concrete action with the United States." This was North Korea's 12th missile launch since the beginning of 2017.

- On May 25, the Commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh announced that Iran has built a third underground missile production factory.

Hajizadeh said that Iran would continue develop its missile capabilities further. He also indicated that Iran would test more ballistic missiles and produce more missile production facilities in the near future. The missile that is currently under production is a surface-to-surface ballistic missile, which would be named "Dezfoul," Hajizadeh added. However, he did not give further details regarding the range and on the capabilities of the missile. In 2015, Iranian state TV aired footage of underground tunnels with ready-to-fire missiles on the back of trucks, saying the facility was one of hundreds of underground missile bases around the country. The US maintains that Iran's missile programme is a breach of international law because the missile could carry nuclear warheads in future. However, Iran has always rejected the US claims, arguing that Iran's ballistic missiles are designed to carry conventional warheads only and are a legitimate part of its defensive capabilities.

- On May 22, a UN conference on eliminating nuclear weapons published its first draft of a proposed treaty aimed at banning nuclear weapons, despite opposition from nuclear-armed states.

Costa Rica's ambassador to the UN, Elaine Whyte Gómez, chaired the treaty drafting conference. She said that she expected revisions but there was "a good level of convergence among the delegations, especially on the core prohibitions." The draft treaty obliges state parties to "never use nuclear weapons" and never "develop, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices." Signatory states would also pledge to never "carry out any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion." The treaty would require ratification by 40 states to come into force. However, it would not be able to strip current nuclear states of their arsenals. The draft treaty

did not provide details on how nuclear-armed countries that renounce those weapons could join the treaty, and under what conditions. The draft treaty's preamble states that the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), entered into force in 1970, would remain "an essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament." The advocates of the ban treaty called the draft an essential milestone towards banning the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and an important step toward their eventual elimination. Nuclear weapon states including the US, Russia, Britain, China, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel boycotted the negotiations. US officials said that the threat posed by North Korea was a reason why nuclear deterrence and gradual but not total nuclear disarmament was required. The draft treaty would be discussed at a second session of negotiations in New York in June 2017. The first round of negotiations was held in March 2017, and more than 120 countries supported the effort.

- According to North Korea's state-run news agency *KCNA* on May 21, North Korea said it successfully test-fired its intermediate-range ballistic missile *Pukguksong-2*.

KCNA said that the missile test was supervised by leader Kim Jong Un. He verified the reliability of Pukguksong-2's solid-fuel engine, stage separation and late-stage guidance for a nuclear warhead. It said data was recorded by a device mounted on the warhead. However, US based experts said that North Korea's Pukguksong-2 was a medium-range missile, questioning the reliability of its solid-fuel engine. They also said that the test did not demonstrate a new capability, or one that could threaten mainland USA.

- On May 21, Israel's state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) signed a defence deal worth \$630 million with India to provide the Indian Navy with air and missile defence system for its four ships.
- On May 17, India successfully test-fired a medium-range surface-to-air missile (MRSAM) system *Barak-8* from the *Kolkata-class* guided-missile destroyer *INS Kochi*.

According to a statement issued by IAI, the company would supply Barak-8 long-range surface-to-air missile (LRSAM) system for four Indian naval ships. IAI said the contract would be signed with state-owned Bharat Electronics Ltd, which serves as the main contractor in the project under the Modi government's "Make in India" policy. LRSAM, jointly developed by IAI and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), is an advanced air and missile defence system. It comprises several key state-of-the-art elements, advanced phased-array radar, command-and-control system, launchers and missiles with advanced radio-frequency seekers. The system provides the ultimate protection against a variety of aerial, naval and air borne threats. India successfully tested MRSAM as part of an operational interception trial aboard Indian Navy ship on May 17, 2017. The missile successfully tracked and intercepted a low-flying high-speed target at enhanced range with pinpoint accuracy. According to Indian defence sources, MRSAM is a variant of the LRSAM Barak-8 system. INS Kochi is one

of the country's three indigenously built Kolkata-class stealth guided missile destroyers inducted in the Navy. MRSAM has been installed on all three destroyers.

- On May 20, the US and Saudi Arabia signed an arms deal worth almost \$110 billion during the first day of President Donald Trump's visit to the country.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said during the joint news conference with his US counterpart Rex Tillerson that the two countries had signed a "joint strategic vision declaration." Jubeir also hailed the talks as a "truly historic day in the relationship between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States." The arms deal signed between the two states are part of a series of wider trade deals. According to Jubeir, the total value of the investments is in excess of \$380 billion. Saudi officials have indicated that the arms deal also includes a pledge to assemble 150 Lockheed Martin Blackhawk helicopters in Saudi Arabia. Apart from Blackhawk helicopters, the deal includes the procurement of tanks and helicopters for border security, ships for coastal security, intelligence-gathering aircraft, a missile defence radar system and cyber security tools. Tillerson said, "The package of defence equipment and services supports the long-term security of Saudi Arabia and the entire Gulf region." He added that the arms deal would help Saudi Arabia deal with "Iranian influence." According to military experts, the arms deal is a win-win for both its signatories especially because it involves arms that Barack Obama was not willing to sell to Saudi Arabia, including missile defence systems. Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest purchaser of US arms, purchasing nearly 10% of US arms exports from 2011 to 2015.

- According to Reuters on May 18, the Indian government announced that it would build 10 heavy water reactors to boost the country's nuclear power capacity.

India's Power Minister Piyush Goyal said that the planned nuclear units would generate business worth \$11bn and create more than 33,000 jobs. He said "a total of 7,000 megawatts will be added. It will help produce clean energy." India is currently operating 22 nuclear plants, with a capacity of 6,780 megawatts. Goyal also indicated that the new reactors amount to more than the country's present installed capacity for nuclear power. However, he did not give details on when India would start working on the construction of these new reactors.

- On May 17, the Trump Administration announced its decision to keep nuclear-related sanctions on Iran suspended as a part of the July 2015 Nuclear Agreement, known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and imposed new sanctions on the country's ballistic missile programme.

The US State Department said that the new missile-related sanctions targeted seven entities, including Iranian military officials, along with an Iranian company and China-based network accused of supplying Iran with materials for ballistic missiles. Iran's support for the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad is also an important factor driving the new sanctions. The State Department also said that Iran would continue to be relieved from nuclear-related sanctions.

Under the JCPOA, the US agreed to lift sanctions on Iran in exchange for Iran curbing its nuclear programme. In response, Iran condemned the new US sanctions on its missile programme, saying they would undermine the nuclear agreement with world powers. Iran also denied the accusation that its ballistic missiles are designed to carry nuclear warheads. Bahram Ghasemi, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, said that Iran's missile programme is part of its "absolute and legal right to build up the country's defensive capabilities". Meanwhile on May 18, 2017, Iran imposed sanctions on seven US companies and two individuals for alleged human rights violations and cooperation with Israel.

- On May 16, South Korean Defence Minister Han Min-koo said that the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system had detected the missile launched by North Korea on May 14, 2017.

Han Min-koo informed the South Korean parliament that the North's missile programme was progressing faster than ever. He said that North Korea has been working to develop long-range nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles to target the US mainland. He said the North's missile test on May 14, 2017, was successful and it was an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) having a range between 3000 to 4000 kilometres. Han noted that THAAD anti-missile system detected the missile successfully – it was its first detection since its deployment in South Korea in April 2017.

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA & EAST ASIA

China

- On May 29, China asked India to be “cautious” and exercise “restraint” over building infrastructure in Arunachal Pradesh.

The response came days after Indian PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the bridge over Brahmaputra River that connects Assam’s region with Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh is an Indian-administered territory that is claimed nearly in its entirety by China. According to Indian media reports, the bridge would enable rapid movement of Indian troops into Arunachal Pradesh, along the China’s border.

- On May 28, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Lu Kang said that China is “strongly dissatisfied with the mention of the East and South China Sea issues in a Group of Seven (G7) statement.”

Kang said that Beijing was committed to properly resolving disputes with all those involved through negotiations while maintaining peace and stability in the two seas. In their communique, the seven countries of the G7, expressed their opposition toward “any unilateral actions that could increase tensions,” and urged all parties to the conflict to start the demilitarisation process. China has a dispute with Japan over a group of uninhabited islets in the East China Sea and it claims sovereignty over all South China Sea islands where Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines also have conflicting claims.

- On May 25, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Lu Kang accused the US of trespassing after a US warship sailed near a reef in the South China Sea.

Lu Kang said that the guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey entered the area “without permission from the Chinese government” and demanded Washington stop “provocative actions”. Meanwhile, China’s Defence Ministry said it had sought an explanation from US officials.

South Korea

- According to *Reuters* on May 30, South Korean President Moon Jae-in ordered a probe after his Defence Ministry failed to inform him that four more launchers for the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) anti-missile system had been brought into the country.
- In a related development on May 31, the office of President Moon Jae-in announced that documents submitted to him were intentionally censored to conceal information on the instalment of four new rocket launchers of the THAAD system.

Presidential spokesman, Yoon Young-chan said Moon was “shocked” to hear that the four additional launchers of the (THAAD) missile system were installed without being reported to the

new government. However, there was no immediate reaction from the United States military or the South Korean Defence Ministry.

Philippine

- On May 27, the Philippine's Military bombarded its southern city of Marawi, where it was engaged in a battle with suspected Daesh-affiliated militants for five days.

Philippine military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Jo-ar Herrera said, "We have identified where they are consolidating so we are doing surgical air strikes to destroy the local terrorist group." The development came as the military vowed strong action in its battle against the militants.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

EUROPE

- According to *BBC* on May 31, Manchester bomber Salman Abedi bought most of the components used to make the bomb himself.

Russ Jackson, head of the North West counter terrorism unit said that many of Abedi's movements and actions were "carried out alone" in the four days prior to the attack. However police have yet to rule out whether he was part of a wider network.

- On May 22, a terrorist attack outside an Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena killed at least 22 people, including children.
- On May 23 British Prime Minister Theresa May put the country on its highest level of alert deploying the military to work with the police over fears that another terrorist attack was imminent.

The announcement came as the police continued to investigate the May 22, 2017 bombing at a pop music concert in Manchester that killed 22 people, including children. "It is a possibility we cannot ignore that there is a wider group of individuals linked to this attack," Prime Minister Theresa May said in Manchester after a meeting of her top security officials. Meanwhile British police raided the home of Salman Abedi the man they identified as the bomber; he died in the blast. Chief Constable Ian Hopkins of the Greater Manchester Police said that the investigation was focusing on determining "whether Abedi was acting alone or as part of a network."

- According to leading British security experts on May 27, the UK's full participation in EU security and intelligence co-operation would be critical to the fight against terrorism after Brexit.

The warning came after PM Theresa May announced wide-ranging plans to counter extremism. The demands to make membership of bodies such as Europol, the EU's criminal intelligence agency, a top priority, came amid fears that Brexit could leave the UK with inferior access to key European databases and deprive British police forces of vital tools in high-level, pan-European anti-terror probes. Senior figures including Sir Hugh Orde, former chief constable of the police service of Northern Ireland and former head of Europol Max-Peter Ratzel and Dominic Grieve, the Tory chair of the Commons Intelligence and Security Committee, all share the view that Britain needs to cooperate with the EU to counter terrorism.

- On May 26, the Polish Prime Minister criticised the "political elites" of Europe in the wake of the Manchester terror attack.

She said the continent must put in place “strong politicians” willing to tackle the threat or risk “crying over your children.” Szydlo’s Government is currently opposing the European Commission on plans for every member state who is signed up to the Common European Asylum System to take in a quota of migrants from Greece and Italy as a solidarity measure. Her predecessor agreed in 2015 to take in 4,500-5,000 migrants, the commitment increased by the EU to 6,200, but Szydlo’s Administration reversed that decision upon taking power and has promised instead to give aid to people in refugee camps in the Middle East.

- On May 25, US President Donald Trump intensified his accusations that NATO allies were not spending enough on defence and warned of more attacks like the Manchester bombing unless the alliance did more to stop militants.

His remarks were “unexpected” and “abrupt.” Trump said certain member countries owed “massive amounts of money” to the US and NATO. Allied contributions are voluntary, with multiple budgets. “Terrorism must be stopped in its tracks, or the horror you saw in Manchester and so many other places will continue forever,” Trump said. “These grave security concerns are the same reason that I have been very, very direct ... in saying that NATO members must finally contribute their fair share,” he said. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg defended Trump, saying that although he was “blunt” he had “a very plain and clear message on the expectations” of allies.

- On May 25, police investigating the Manchester Arena bomb attack stopped sharing information with the US after leaks to the media.

UK officials were outraged when photos appearing to show debris from the attack appeared in the New York Times. It came after the name of bomber Salman Abedi was leaked to US media just hours after the Manchester bombing that left 22 dead. Theresa May said she would tell Donald Trump at a NATO meeting that shared intelligence “must remain secure.” The US’ acting ambassador to the UK “unequivocally condemned” the leaks during a BBC radio interview. “These leaks were reprehensible, deeply distressing,” Lewis Lukens said. “We have had communications at the highest level of our government ... we are determined to identify these leaks and to stop them.”

- According to Amnesty International on May 31 France has used the state of emergency imposed after the 2015 Paris attacks to curb peaceful demonstrations.

Amnesty International said hundreds of decrees had been issued under the emergency laws, banning public assemblies or individuals from protests. The French Interior Ministry has not yet responded to the accusation. The state of emergency allows searches without a warrant and people

to be placed under house arrest. It is set to expire on July 15, 2017 but President Emmanuel Macron has said he would ask parliament to extend it for the sixth time until November.

- During a joint news conference on May 29 with his Russian counterpart President Vladimir Putin in Versailles, French President Emmanuel Macron accused two Russian news outlets *RT* and *Sputnik* of acting “as organs of influence of propaganda” during the French presidential campaign.

According to observers, Macron “delivered a blunt greeting” to Putin criticising the use of chemical weapons by Syria’s Russian-backed government and blasting two Russian state-owned media organisations as “organs of influence and propaganda.” Macron had invited Putin to France to reset a relationship that has turned increasingly sour. Putin did more than any other foreign leader to undermine Macron’s legitimacy in this country’s recent presidential election, meeting with his far-right opponent during the campaign. His meeting with Putin came just days after Macron made his mark on the world stage, welcoming President Trump with an aggressive handshake that Macron said was aimed at showing that he wouldn’t “make small concessions.”

- On May 29, the EU’s chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, urged European MPs to remain cautious during the Brexit talks.

Barnier said there was a risk of unfair British competition. He was speaking at an EU parliamentary conference in Malta. The negotiations on UK withdrawal from the EU will start on June 19, 2017. The UK’s exit bill and EU citizens’ rights are likely to be important issues. EU leaders want progress on those issues, as well as Northern Ireland border arrangements, before talks about a long-term EU-UK trade deal begin. However, the British government wants trade talks to be conducted simultaneously with the talks on UK withdrawal terms. UK ministers have also reacted angrily to reports that the EU may demand as much as €100bn from the UK.

- On May 29, leaders of the G7 group of rich nations failed to agree to a statement on climate change.

Although six world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the Paris accord, the US refused to recommit to the agreement, saying it would make a decision next week. Trump has dismissed global warming as a “hoax”, and has previously threatened to pull out of the accord. A US news site reported that Trump had told members of his inner circle that the US would withdraw from the Paris agreement. This was Trump’s first G7 summit. G7 leaders from the US, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan have agreed a statement on fighting terrorism.

- On May 28, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared a new chapter in US-European relations following contentious meetings with President Trump earlier last week, saying that Europe must take its fate into its own hands.

The visit increased tensions after Trump argued with European leaders on trade, defence and climate change. Merkel who has been dubbed Europe's de facto leader told a rally in Munich that the days when her continent could rely on others was "over to a certain extent. This is what I have experienced in the last few days." Alluding to Brexit, she said, "Of course we need to have friendly relations with the US and with the UK, and with other neighbours, including Russia." However, she added, "We have to fight for our own future ourselves, for our destiny as Europeans."

- According to *The Guardian* on May 25, an increase in the number of Polish people and other European citizens leaving the UK since the Brexit vote means there has been an 84,000 drop in net migration to the UK.

The Office of National Statistics said the fall in net migration in 2016 was driven by a 40,000 rise in emigration compared with 2015, mainly of EU citizens, and a fall of 43,000 in immigration. The immigration drop was partly due to 25,000 fewer Poles and other eastern Europeans coming to work in Britain possibly due to the referendum vote, and a 16,000 rise in the number of them leaving. Net migration from the A8 countries was 5,000 in 2016, the lowest level since those countries joined the EU in 2004.

- On May 25, former Greek Prime Minister Lucas Papademos was injured by an explosion inside his car in Athens.

Reports suggest the blast may have been caused by a letter bomb. Papademos received leg, arm and stomach injuries, but officials said his condition was "not a cause for concern." No group has so far claimed responsibility for the blast. Papademos was appointed caretaker Prime Minister in November 2011 amid political and economic turmoil. He served in post until May 2012. He also served as vice-president of the European Central Bank. In March, a letter bomb sent from Greece exploded at the IMF office in Paris. The employee who opened the letter had suffered hand and face injuries and staff was evacuated. Earlier a parcel bomb meant for German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble was intercepted and destroyed in Berlin before it could explode. Greek far-left group Conspiracy of Fire Cells said it was responsible for sending that device

- On May 24, US President Donald Trump met Pope Francis at the Vatican.

Trump was granted a short private audience with the Pope on the latest leg of his overseas trip. In the past, the two men have clashed over issues including migration, climate change and a Mexico-US wall. After the meeting the Vatican said there had been an "exchange of views" on

international issues. Trump said he was “more determined than ever” to pursue peace in the world after the meeting.

- On May 22, the EU’s chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, said he does not want to consider the chance that talks on the UK’s exit from the EU could collapse.

Barnier was speaking after his UK counterpart, David Davis, made clear the threat to walk out was genuine if the EU’s “divorce bill” was too high. EU ministers gave Barnier the green light for talks to start in June 2017, after the UK election. “No deal” was not an option, he said.

- On May 17, EU officials and the US decided against a ban on laptops and tablets in cabin baggage on flights from Europe.

Following a four-hour meeting in Brussels to discuss the threats to aviation security, officials said other measures were still being considered. US officials had previously said they were looking into extending to Europe a ban on electronics on flights from eight mostly Muslim countries. The measure was introduced over fears a bomb could be concealed in a device. EU officials requested the meeting after recent reports suggested US authorities had new information regarding laptop parts being turned into explosives. Details of a specific threat have not been made public.

- On May 16 France’s data protection watchdog CNIL fined Facebook even as it is being investigated by Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Spain for data privacy violations around the tracking of users and non-users and the use of user data for advertising.

The data regulators joined hands to form a contact group to analyse the changes Facebook made to its privacy policy in 2014. The French watchdog CNIL hit Facebook with the maximum fine possible at the point at which it started its investigation in 2014. As of October last year CNIL can now issue fines of up to €3m.

---Amina Afzal

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Iran

- On May 22, Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani dismissed US President Donald Trump's Summit with Arab leaders as being 'just a show.' He insisted that missile tests would continue.

Rouhani's comments followed strong criticism of both the Iranian nuclear and missile programmes from President Trump during his visit to Saudi Arabia and Israel. While talking to reporters, President Rouhani said, "Our missiles are for our defence and for peace, they are not offensive. Know that while there is a technical need to conduct missile tests, we will do so and we will ask the permission of no one." When asked about Trump's Summit with Arab leaders, President Rouhani said it was "just a show with no practical or political value of any kind." Regarding the billion-dollar deals signed between Trump and the Saudi government, he said, "You can't solve terrorism just by giving your people's money to a superpower." He added that it was Iran's allies in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq that had been leading the fight against Daesh and other militants. He also said that Iran has stood by their side and continues to do so.

- On May 20, Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani won a second term in the re-election by a wide margin.

President Rouhani secured 23.5 million (57%) votes while his rival, Ebrahim Raisi got 15.8 million (38.3%) votes in the re-election. During his first speech after winning the election, Rouhani said Iran had chosen the 'path of engagement with the world' and rejected extremism. Rouhani's mandate protects the nuclear deal, which has been his landmark achievement to date, as well as his focus on foreign investment. Although Raisi had positioned himself as a defender of the poor and called for a much tougher line with the West, his revolutionary rhetoric and efforts to win over working-class voters with promises of increased handouts gained limited traction.

Iraq

- During a May 28 interview to *CBS News*, US Defence Secretary, Jim Mattis, said that civilian casualties are inevitable in the war against Daesh.
- On May 25, a US military investigation acknowledged that more than 100 civilians were killed in a US air strike on a building in Mosul during operations against Daesh in March 2017.

The probe concluded that US strike in the Al Jadida district accidentally had triggered explosives placed in the building by Daesh militants, causing it to collapse. It has been described

as one of the largest incidents of civilian casualties since the US-led coalition started operations against Daesh in Iraq and Syria in 2014. According to non-governmental organisations, the attacks are claiming ever more civilian lives. During the interview, Mattis said, “Civilian casualties are a fact of life in this sort of situation.” He also added that ‘we do everything humanly possible to avoid civilian casualties at all costs.’ Some NGOs have blamed the rising civilian death toll on a push by the Trump Administration to accelerate the pace of combat in an effort to defeat Daesh. The coalition has officially acknowledged responsibility for more than 450 civilian deaths since its bombing campaign began in 2014, including 105 in the Iraqi city of Mosul on March 17, 2017. However, according to Airwars, a London-based collective of journalists and researchers that tracks civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria, the coalition strikes have killed at least 3,681 people.

- On May 19, at least 35 people were killed in a series of bombings in the southern Iraqi city of Basra.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack. The first blast occurred outside the Ar-Rumeila military base, where eight people were killed, including the head of the local intelligence establishment as well as a number of intelligence forces. Confirming the first bombing, Basra operational commander, Jameel al-Shemri, announced in a news briefing that a second bomber also blew up his explosives-packed vehicle near the al-Sadra checkpoint on a highway leading to the region’s oilfields. The southern province of Basra has been one of the most stable and secure regions of Iraq, in which bomb attacks are quite rare. Meanwhile, Iraq’s Interior Ministry spokesman Sa’ad Ma’an announced that two explosives-laden vehicles were simultaneously detonated at the entrance to the Abu-Dashir area in the southern district of Baghdad, killing at least 24 people. There has been an increase in terror attacks as Daesh terrorists in the city of Mosul are under intense pressure. The Iraqi military and volunteer militia forces have almost liberated the city having retaken 98% of the city.

Israel

- US President Donald Trump visited Israel and Palestine on May 22, as part of his first trip abroad as president.

President Trump held separate talks with Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas. The visit was aimed at pushing forward what Trump described as the “ultimate peace deal” between Israelis and Palestinians. Before his meeting with Netanyahu, Trump visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Western Wall, becoming the first sitting US president to visit the holy Jewish site. The move was seen as a gesture of support for Jewish claims to the site. President Trump said he shared Israel’s concern about Iran and demanded that Tehran immediately cease military and financial backing of “terrorists and militias”. Donald Trump also reaffirmed his commitment to Israel and vowed to

make efforts to solve the Middle East conflict. Trump later said he was “very, very honored” to be visiting the country, highlighting that he came “to this sacred and ancient land to reaffirm the unbreakable bond between the US and the state of Israel.” Benjamin Netanyahu praised Trump for being the first US president to visit Israel on his first trip abroad. He lauded Trump’s peacemaking effort.

President Trump also visited Bethlehem to meet Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, in hopes of restarting stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. During a news conference, Abbas stressed the need for a two-state solution. He said, “I hope that history will mark Trump as the man who achieved peace ... Freedom for our people is key to stability in the region.” Analysts have warned however that with strengthened US-Israeli ties under the Trump Administration, a solution to the long-standing conflict may not be possible. President Abbas reaffirmed his commitment to working with the US and the Israelis in order to achieve peace and for an early resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Following his meetings with Netanyahu and Abbas, President Trump said, “President Abbas assures me he is ready to work toward that goal in good faith, and Prime Minister Netanyahu has promised the same.” Donald Trump did not talk about borders or the settlements’ issue.

Libya

- On May 30, Egyptian jets conducted air strikes against the Libyan city of Derna, in retaliation to the killing of 29 Egyptian Christians by Daesh militants.

Egypt’s air force began the attacks just hours after militants drove dozens of people to a monastery in the southern Egyptian province of Minya and opened fire, killing 29 and wounding 24 others. According to Ahmad Messmari, the spokesman for Libyan National Army, the air strikes are joint ones between the Libyan National Army and the Egyptian Army. According to Libyan operational commander, the strikes targeted Majlis Mujahideen Derna and the Abu Salim brigade, two local Libyan groups allied with Al Qaeda. Egypt has occasionally carried out air strikes in Libya since the country descended into chaos following the 2011 civil war that ousted Muammar Gaddafi. Militant groups, including Daesh, have gained ground in Derna, which links Libya to Egypt. Daesh first attempted to establish a presence in Libya in Derna, but it faced armed resistance from more locally affiliated militant groups including Majlis Mujahideen Derna coalition and Abu Salim brigade. It was driven out of the city in 2015 and later set up its main Libyan base in Sirte.

Palestine

- On May 27, Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike in Israeli jails ended their mass protest after Israel agreed to a deal after refusing to negotiate for weeks.

- On May 25, the UN human rights chief expressed alarm over reports of ‘punitive measures by Israeli authorities’ against hundreds of prisoners who were on hunger strike for nearly 40 days.

More than 1,500 prisoners launched the hunger strike on April 17, 2017 to press for an end to administrative detention and solitary confinement, as well as longer and more regular family visits, installation of landlines in prisons and better healthcare. Palestinians hailed the deal as a victory for the hunger strikers after Israeli authorities repeatedly vowed not to negotiate with convicted “terrorists”. Israeli authorities conceded to one of the prisoners’ main demands - that they should have two family visits a month instead of the one they were entitled to before the strike. According to prisoner rights groups, there are currently 6,500 Palestinian political prisoners held by Israel, including more than 500 administrative detainees who are arrested on ‘secret evidence’, unaware of the accusations against them, and are not allowed to defend themselves in court. Their detention periods can be renewed indefinitely.

- On May 23, US President, Donald Trump called on Israelis and Palestinians to make compromises for peace.

The comments came as President Trump wrapped up his visit to Israel and Palestine. However, he did not offer any specifics on how to resolve the conflict. During his speech before leaving for Rome, Trump offered a forceful defence of the Jewish state and pledged to protect the country from Iran. He also said he remained ‘personally committed’ to helping Israel reach a deal with the Palestinians. President Trump further said, “Both sides will face tough decisions. But with determination, compromise and the belief that peace is possible, Israelis and Palestinians can make a deal.” He offered no detail and did not specifically mention the two-state solution, which has been the focus of international efforts and US Middle East diplomacy.

Qatar

- On May 24, Qatar launched an investigation and went into damage control mode after accusing hackers of putting false remarks by the Emir on state media.

The four-hour cyberattack, which hit the Qatar News Agency’s website and Twitter account, raised concerns in the country and across the Middle East because of the content of the stories. Among the topics supposedly addressed by Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani were the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, strategic relations with Iran and comments about Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas. There were also remarks about alleged ‘tensions’ between Qatar and the administration of US President Donald Trump. The Twitter account carried a statement from Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani about Qatar withdrawing its ambassadors from several nearby countries. His ministry denied the story. Qatar said what

occurred was a 'shameful cybercrime' and that the reports were completely untrue. It added that an investigation had been launched and the hackers would be 'traced and prosecuted.'

Saudi Arabia

- On May 20, US President Donald Trump arrived in Saudi Arabia for a two-day visit to attend three major summits including the Arab-Islamic-American Summit, the Saudi Arabia and US Summit and the GCC and US Summit.
- On May 21, US President Donald Trump, leaders and representatives of 55 Arab and Muslim-dominated countries participated in the Arab-Islamic-American Summit in Riyadh, focusing on unity in the fight against terrorism.

It was President Trump's first official foreign visit since he took office in January 2017. The visit was aimed at strengthening security and economic ties. Saudi Arabia's King Salman presented Donald Trump with the Kingdom's top civilian honour. The first day of Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia saw the announcement of billions of dollars in trade deals. There were 15 deals worth \$400 billion. Among the major agreements was an arms deal worth \$110 billion with Saudi Arabia, being described as the largest in US history. Saudi Aramco also signed a \$50 billion deal with US companies. Among the three summits, Arab-Islamic-American Summit is regarded as the most important. King Salman of Saudi Arabia was the first to address the Summit, telling the gathering that Islam provided the best example for coexistence and "will always be the religion of mercy and coexistence." King Salman highlighted that some people seek to present distorted picture of Islam. He further said, "We all, peoples and countries, reject in every language and in every form damaging the relations of Muslim countries with friendly countries and profiling countries based on a religious or sectarian basis." The Saudi king also announced a historic agreement with the US to track and target sources of terrorist financing. King Salman also spoke of how "the Iranian regime has spearheaded terrorism since Khomeini's revolution."

In his address, President Trump said that the US was seeking a "coalition of nations" in the Middle East with the aim of "stamping out extremism." Trump told the gathering that an overwhelming majority of victims of terrorist attacks were the "innocent people of the Arab, Muslim and Middle Eastern nations", pointing out that "95 % of the victims of terrorist attacks are themselves Muslims." Trump also said that the "Iranian regime is responsible for so much instability in the region," and that it "funds arms, trains militias that spread destruction and chaos." At the conclusion of the Summit, Saudi Arabia issued the "Riyadh Declaration." The declaration frequently referred to Iran and terrorism, and promised to raise a 34,000-member-strong joint force to fight against terrorism in Syria and Iraq. Trump also met with some leaders from Muslim-majority countries who had gathered in Riyadh for the Summit, including Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Bahrain's King Hamad and Egyptian President Abdel

Fattah al-Sisi. He also signed a memorandum of understanding with the members of the GCC on countering financing of terrorism.

Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif also attended the Riyadh Summit where he was not allowed to address the Summit participants. According to a report in The Nation, Sharif was not allowed to speak at the event, even as leaders of some small countries put forward their views on terrorism. The report stated, "The popular sentiment among the majority of Pakistani media delegation was that of a total humiliation of the sole Muslim nuclear power because not only was there no mention of Islamabad's role against global terrorism but also the prime minister of the 'frontline state' was denied the opportunity to put forth its point of view." Critics of the Summit also pointed out that during his speech, President Trump talked about how terrorism has affected countries like the US, India, Russia, China etc. but he skipped Pakistan which has been the most affected state from terrorism.

Syria

- On May 26, at least 117 civilians, said to be relatives of Daesh fighters, were killed in new US-led strikes on Syria.
- On May 28, at least 20 civilians were killed in US air strikes on Raqqa.

The air strikes came just hours after the UN urged nations striking the militants to protect civilians. Bombing raids by the US-led coalition have pounded positions of Daesh across Iraq and Syria since the militant group claimed responsibility for the bombing of a concert in Manchester on May 22, 2017. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the air strike on the town of Mayadin also killed 33 children. Most of the people killed were families seeking refuge in the town's municipal building. In similar attacks on May 25 and May 24, 2017, coalition strikes on the town killed 37 and 15 civilians respectively. The town has seen an influx of displaced families from Daesh-held territory in Iraq and Syria, including its stronghold Raqqa. It is in Syria's oil-rich east near the border with Iraq, a region considered a prize by many of the enemies of Daesh including the Syrian Army.

Turkey

- On May 28, Turkish warplanes hit seven targets in the Avasin-Basyan region of northern Iraq, killing at least 13 militants of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Turkish jets bombed northern Iraq in the latest attack inside the country without coordination with the government in Baghdad. According to the Turkish military, those killed were believed to be preparing for an attack against Turkey. Another 10 PKK militants were killed in a separate

air strike on May 27, 2017, on Turkey's southeastern province of Van. PKK militants have been waging a deadly campaign in southeastern Turkey for decades, which has left more than 40,000 people dead. Turkey regularly bombs the border area between Iraq and Turkey where PKK militants are based. Ankara has also deployed troops on Iraqi soil, causing a diplomatic crisis with Baghdad.

- According to *Anadolu* news agency on May 22, Russia agreed to lift the remaining trade sanctions imposed on Turkey following the November 2015 Turkish military's downing of a Russian warplane over the Turkey-Syria border.

The Russian government confirmed that the accord "on lifting of bilateral trade restrictions" was signed in the presence of Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev and his Turkish counterpart, Binali Yildirim. A corresponding agreement was signed by Turkish Deputy Prime Minister, Mehmet Simsek and his Russian counterpart, Arkady Dvorkovich on the sidelines of the 25th anniversary Summit of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in Istanbul. According to analysts, the accord is aimed at normalising and developing the Russian and Turkish economies, and is an attempt to enhance the current trade volume between the two countries. It also called for turning the Black Sea region into a "zone of peace, stability and prosperity." Relations between Ankara and Moscow deteriorated after the downing of a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 fighter jet over Syria in November 2015. In response, Russia suspended all military deals with Turkey and imposed economic sanctions saying the bans would not be lifted until Moscow received an apology from Ankara. It also ended visa-free travel for Turks as a retaliatory measure.

Yemen

- On May 28, Yemeni troops carried out major retaliatory attacks against separate locations in southwestern Saudi Arabia, killing at least 13 Saudi soldiers.

According to the Yemeni media, six of the killings occurred at the al-Fuaz military base in the Saudi region of Najran. Yemeni forces also struck a military vehicle carrying three Saudi troops on their way to the Alib command post in the Kingdom's Asir region. Four more Saudi troopers died in another attack against the outpost. Yemen's artillery units carried out mortar and rocket attacks against Saudi mercenaries in the Sirwah District of Ma'rib Province. Sirwah and the Attan area in the neighboring Sana'a Province came under Saudi bombardment. Saudi forces also carried out mortar raids against the Al Sheikh and Al Omar areas of the Monabbih District in the northern Sa'ada Province. The Yemeni Army and its allied Houthi fighters have been fighting against the Saudi-led coalition, which launched its military campaign to restore Yemen's former Riyadh-allied government to power.

- According to the Pentagon, on May 23, at least seven people were killed in a US ground and aerial operation in Yemen's central province of Ma'rib.

According to US CENTCOM, the raid was carried out with support from the former Yemeni government and targeted a compound belonging to the al-Qaeda militant group. The statement said, "During this operation, US forces killed seven AQAP (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) militants through a combination of small arms fire and precision airstrikes." In a related development on May 22, 2017, the United Nations' Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed traveled to Yemen, and said he wanted to prevent any attack on the western port city of Hodaydah, which is a major lifeline for imports into Yemen. These remarks followed a Saudi threat to attack the port city and retake it from the Houthi Ansarullah movement. Yemen has seen regular US drone strikes, with Washington claiming to target al-Qaeda elements even as local sources maintain that civilians have been the main victims. Yemen has also witnessed military strikes in a war by the Saudi-led coalition since late March 2015. The US has also been providing assistance to the coalition in Yemen.

---Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA

Pakistan External

- On May 18, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) restrained Pakistan from executing convicted Indian spy Kulbushan Jadhav until a final verdict.

The development follows a unanimous decision by the 10-member bench at The Hague ordering “provisional measures” that called upon Pakistan to “take all measures to ensure that Kulbushan Sudhir Jadhav, an Indian national, is not executed pending a final judgement of the court in the Jadhav case. Pakistan accepted the decision and said “the orders do not affect the current status of Jadhav’s case as his execution was not imminent, given pending appeals.” However, Pakistan’s Foreign Affairs Adviser, Sartaj Aziz, said on May 20, 2017 that country’s domestic laws would prevail in the matter. Earlier on May 15, 2017, Pakistan had challenged the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Jadhav case arguing that criminal cases under the Vienna Convention do not fall under the international court’s jurisdiction. In its arguments, Pakistan also cited a 2008 bilateral agreement on consular access with India where both sides agreed that the right to consular access would not apply in matters related to national security. The Court, however, rejected Pakistan’s argument. It observed that India sought to ground its jurisdiction in Article I of the Optional Protocol to the Vienna Convention, which provides that the Court has jurisdiction over “disputes arising out of the interpretation or application of the Vienna Convention”. The Court noted that “Parties differ on the question of India’s consular assistance to Mr. Jadhav under the Vienna Convention”. The Court further observed that “the existence of a 2008 bilateral Agreement between the Parties on consular relations does not change its conclusion on jurisdiction”.

Pakistan’s government modified its 1960 declaration before the ICJ on March 29, 2017, which added the clause that the ICJ would not have compulsory jurisdiction on “all matters related to the national security of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan”. The new declaration revoked the previous Declaration made in September 1960, in which Pakistan had agreed to the compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ and did not contained any exception. The Indian government initiated proceedings in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Pakistan on May 8, 2017, accusing the latter of violating the Vienna Convention in the case of Indian spy Kulbushan Jadhav. Pakistan had stressed that the Indian spy was sentenced to death after fulfilling all necessary legal requirements and he was also given counsel to defend allegations against him.

- According to *Dawn* on May 30, the US State Department’s budget proposals for fiscal year 2018 indicated a major cut in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funds for Pakistan. The amount was reduced from \$255m in 2017 to \$100m in 2018. The current 2017 fiscal ends on September 30, 2017.

The State Department has kept its options open about whether it would be a grant or a loan. Earlier media reports indicated that the Trump Administration has proposed in its annual budget to the Congress for converting the US Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Pakistan into a loan guarantee. The budget proposals, in May, 2017 include \$800m of reimbursements to

Pakistan for its military and logistical support to coalition forces in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, \$200 million has been proposed for the Economic Support and Development Fund in Pakistan.

- Dawn reported on May 29 that the US intelligence community has informed the Congress that Islamabad does not want Indian influence in Afghanistan and may turn to China to balance New Delhi's influence on its western borders.

The development follows a hearing on Afghanistan at the Senate Armed Services Committee where US intelligence chiefs assessed the situation in Afghanistan. Dan Coats, US National Intelligence Director said, "Pakistan is concerned about international isolation and sees its position through the prism of India's rising international status." He added that Pakistan is also wary of India's deepening ties to the US. He alleged that Islamabad's failure to curb terrorists in Pakistan "present a sustained threat to the US interests in the region and these groups continue to plan and conduct attacks in India and Afghanistan". Earlier in May 2017, US Republican Congressman, Adam Kinzinger, suggested carrying out air strikes on alleged terrorist targets in Pakistan. Pakistan maintains it cannot be held responsible for the situation in Afghanistan. In January 2017, Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Adviser, Sartaj Aziz, said that a lack of political consensus about how to deal with the Taliban has marred efforts to initiate peace talks between warring Afghan factions. On May 22, US Ambassador David Hale also met Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa and expressed the hope that Pakistan would not allow terrorists to use its soil against any other country.

- According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on May 27, the Chaman crossing into Afghanistan's Kandahar province was reopened on "humanitarian grounds" following an official request submitted by Afghan authorities.

Pakistan army said that no border violation would be acceptable adding that "Pakistani troops will maintain their positions along the international border in Killi Luqman and Killi Jahangir on Pakistani side of the border." Pakistan closed its Chaman border crossing with Afghanistan on May 5, 2017 after nine people were killed and more than 40 injured when Afghan forces opened fire at a government census team and the troops escorting them in the villages of Killi Luqman and Killi Jahangir on the Pakistani side of the border.

- Talking to journalists in Saudi Arabia on May 22, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called for an accord among Muslim countries to eliminate the menace of terrorism. The remarks came following PM Sharif's visit to Saudi Arabia to attend the Riyadh Summit 2017 at the invitation of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz.

PM Sharif informed journalists that Pakistan has suffered immeasurably due to terrorism which includes a financial cost of around \$120 billion and thousands of lives. According to critics, PM Sharif was denied the opportunity to speak at the forum. However, Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesman, Nafees Zakaria, said on May 25 that the Saudi King apologised to all participating leaders for not getting an opportunity to speak at the summit "due to serious shortage of time". Security analysts in Pakistan also criticised President Trump's speech at the summit in which he named India among terror victim states but did not mention Pakistan or its role against global terrorism.

- During his address to the World Affairs Council in Washington on May 16, Pakistan's Ambassador to the US, Aizaz Chaudhry said that Pakistan is seeking a broad-based, sustainable and not a transactional relationship with the US.

On China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Ambassador Chaudhry stressed that Pakistan's relations with China are "not a zero-sum game for any other country including the US." Ambassador Chaudhry further said that "Afghanistan has multiple problems which are not related to terrorism only," adding that Pakistan is often accused for "failure in Afghanistan which is not true." He stated that Pakistan believes that a comprehensive approach is required for the Afghan problem.

- Dawn reported on May 18 that two staff members of the Pakistan's Embassy in Kabul were detained for hours by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the intelligence agency of Afghanistan, under unclear circumstances.

Pakistan's Embassy in Kabul approached the Afghan Foreign Ministry and sought immediate release of the two staffers. On May 17, Pakistan summoned the Afghan Deputy Head of Mission to lodge Pakistan's strong protest over the detention of two of its diplomatic officials in Kabul by the Afghan security agencies." Pakistan accused Afghanistan of violating Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations (1961).

Pakistan Internal

- On May 28, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's son Hussain Nawaz appeared before the Supreme Court-appointed Joint Investigation Team (JIT) to record his statement in the "Panama Papers" case involving PM Sharif family's offshore properties.

Earlier on April 20, 2017, the Supreme Court of Pakistan had issued its verdict on the "Panama Papers" case and ordered further investigation of PM Nawaz Sharif and his children by a specially constituted Joint Investigation Team (JIT).

- On May 28, India authorities enforced a curfew in parts of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) following anti-India protests.

The curfew followed widespread violence over the killing of a senior leader of the Hizbul Mujahideen group, Sabzar Ahmad Bhat. Indian authorities also blocked internet and mobile services in the region.

- On May 23, Asif Ghafoor, DG, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) rejected Indian claims of destroying a Pakistani post along the LoC in Nowshera sector and firing by Pakistan Army on civilians across the Line of Control (LoC).

The statement came immediately after the Indian Army claimed that it was engaging in "punitive fire assaults" on Pakistani posts aiding infiltrators into India. Pakistan's military instead alleged that the Indian Army had resorted to unprovoked ceasefire violations on May 13, 2017

causing civilian casualties and claimed that following Indian aggression “a befitting and stern response was mounted on Indian posts”. Pakistan army also issued a video of its shelling of Indian positions after the “unprovoked ceasefire violation”. On May 24, 2017, Pakistan also apprised the United Nations Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) of ceasefire violations by India along the LoC targeting civilian population. Meanwhile, at a US Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on May 23, 2017, US intelligence officials warned Congress that India may launch aggressive actions inside Pakistan on the pretext of stopping ‘cross-border attacks’ and that the ongoing exchange of artillery shells across the Line of Control (LoC) may lead to a direct conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

India

- On May 30, an Indian court charged three leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) including India’s Water Resources Minister, Uma Bharti and India’s former Deputy Prime Minister, Lal Krishna Advani with criminal conspiracy over the demolition of a 16th-century, Babri mosque in Uttar Pradesh by Hindu extremists in 1992.

The court also charged BJP leader, Murli Manohar Joshi, in connection with the demolition of the mosque. The BJP under the leadership of Lal Krishna Advani had led the campaign in 1992 demanding that Hindus should be allowed to build a temple over a mosque which they believed was the birthplace of Hindu deity, Lord Ram. The campaign prompted massive Hindu-Muslim violence in the country after a Hindu mob demolished the mosque on December 6, 1992. The accused leaders have rejected charges and insisted they played no role in inciting the mob. However, Water Resources Minister, Uma Bharti said she “contributed to the movement with complete faith,” and added “I don’t consider myself guilty.” The trial of senior BJP leaders has raised new concerns in India where the ruling BJP under Narendra Modi has been accused of marginalising Muslims in India.

- During his visit to Germany on May 30, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met German Chancellor Angela Merkel and signed multiple agreements including cyber politics, development initiatives, and cooperation in the field of railways.

Following the meeting between the two sides, India’s Ministry of External Affairs said New Delhi has decided to start negotiation of a Free Trade Agreement with the European Union, which were stalled in 2013. The visit is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s four-nation tour to Germany, Spain, Russia and France.

- On May 22, China’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hua Chunying said that China would oppose India’s unilateral entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), pending a consensus on the membership of the nuclear weapon states that have not signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Hua Chunying also said that China’s position on the participation of non-NPT members in the NSG has not changed. He reiterated that any formula for NSG membership should be based on a “non-discriminatory approach,” and should not “contradict the customary international law in

the field of non-proliferation". The remarks came as the NSG is scheduled to hold its plenary in June, 2017, in Switzerland. Besides China, other countries that are opposed to India's membership into the NSG include New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, Austria and Mexico. They insist on a "criteria based" process for allowing non-NPT members into the NSG. Critics have argued that country-based exceptions for NSG membership will undermine efforts to prevent proliferation.

- According to *The Hindu* on May 20, Indian Air Force Chief, B.S. Dhanoa wrote a personal letter to all 12,000 officers of the Indian Air Force on March 30, 2017 asking them to be 'prepared for action at a very short notice'.
- In a related development on May 24, 2017, Pakistan's Air Force Chief, Air Chief Marshal, Sohail Aman, vowed a "befitting response," in case of "any kind of misadventure" by the enemy.

The rare decision to send such a letter to all personnel of the IAF comes at a time when India and Pakistan relations are at an all time low due to the Jadhav case and the worsening situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).

Afghanistan

- On May 31, at least 80 people were killed and more than 350 wounded after a bomb blast in Kabul's diplomatic area.

The Afghan Taliban denied that they carried out the attack. No group has yet claimed the attack. Several embassies, including that of Pakistan were damaged after the huge explosion. As the situation deteriorates across Afghanistan, the Pentagon is considering sending additional troops to the country.

- On May 17, at least six people were killed in a suicide attack on the Afghan state television station in Afghanistan's province of Nangarhar. Daesh militant group claimed responsibility for the attack.
- In a related development on May 27, at least 18 people were killed in a bomb attack in Afghanistan's eastern Khost province.

Taliban spokesman Zabih-ullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was aimed at members of the Afghan security forces. In a separate development on the same day, fighting erupted between militants and security forces in Afghanistan's province of Badghis, killing at least 36 people.

--- Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

UNITED NATIONS

- A United Nations report released on May 19 indicated human rights violations and abuses against civilians that may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, in the multi-ethnic town of Yei in South Sudan.

The report, published by the Human Rights Division of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), contains the findings of an in-depth investigation into violations committed in and around Yei between July 2016 and January 2017. The report has noted that the violations and abuses are committed on the basis of ethnicity or their presumed association with parties to the conflict in South Sudan. Violence erupted in Yei when government forces reached the town while chasing opposition leader Riek Machar. Owing to strong divisions of people along ethnic lines, the conflict resulted in targeted killings, arrests and mass civilian displacement of more than half of the population of the town. Satellite imagery shows that there was widespread burning of homes and businesses in the town.

- On May 19, Babar Baloch, spokesperson at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said that more than 30,000 Somali refugees have returned to Somalia from Yemen owing to the continued war in the country.

Baloch said that Somali refugees were approaching the Agency for assistance to return as they had concerns regarding safety and security and limited access to services in Yemen. According to the UNHCR, there are approximately 280,000 refugees in Yemen who are facing worsening security conditions in the country and their needs are increasing with every passing day. About 91% of those are Somali refugees. Yemen traditionally accepts refugees who remain in need of international protection. It is the only country in the Arabian Peninsula signatory to the Refugee Convention and the Protocol. However, the ongoing war has limited the capacity of the country to provide adequate assistance and protection to refugees.

- On May 16, Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, called on Israel to comply with international law and standards for detention.

Michael Lynk raised concerns over Israel's use of administrative detention, which involves imprisonment without charge, trial and conviction or meaningful due process. He said Israel's use of administrative detention had deprived detainees of basic legal safeguards guaranteed by international human rights law and it was not in compliance with international humanitarian law as well. He indicated that around 6,000 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel are incarcerated in prisons within Israel, and not in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in contravention of International Humanitarian Law. These Palestinians were detained owing to their participation in the hunger strike. Lynk noted that prisoners everywhere have a right to

engage in hunger strikes to protest their living conditions, and they should not be punished as a result.

- On May 16, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) expressed deep concern over the continuing increase in conflict-related child deaths in Afghanistan.

Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, indicated that the first four months of 2017 had witnessed the highest recorded number of child civilian casualties resulting from the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. According to UNAMA records, some 283 child deaths have occurred between January 1 and April 30, 2017, demonstrating a 21% increase compared to the same period in 2016. Children have been killed by explosive remnants of war in civilian-populated areas and in ground fighting. UNAMA urged parties to the conflict to take appropriate measures regarding the protection of children. UNAMA also welcomed the Afghan government's commitment to formally ratify Protocol V to the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW). The Protocol recognises serious post-conflict humanitarian problems caused by explosive remnants of war and addresses remedial measures in order to minimise the occurrence, effects and the risk of explosive remnants of war.

--- Moiz Khan