

December 16 – December 31

AREA BRIEF

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Area Briefs: 16-31 December

General Observations

Pakistan

- The Pakistan-US relationship continued to nosedive with the US release of the Trump Administration's US National Security Strategy 2017 (NSS) on 18 December. With regard to Pakistan, the NSS is full of demands and criticism with Pakistan being called upon to "to continue demonstrating that it is a responsible steward of its nuclear assets." In addition, the usual spectre of nuclear weapons and/or technology falling into the hands of terrorists is raised as well as "the prospect for an Indo-Pakistani military conflict that could lead to a nuclear exchange." Trump, during his speech on the NSS also demanded Pakistan show more decisive action against terrorist groups operating from the country and demanded that Pakistan has to help the US as it gets "massive payments every year" from it.
- Following the Trump speech, the *New York Times* on 29 December reported that the US could also withhold \$255 million in aid to Pakistan. Pakistan has few friends in Trump's National Security Council with the director for South Asia Lisa Curtis being a longstanding anti-Pakistan analyst who worked previously for the conservative Heritage Foundation where she wrote a paper with Husain Haqqani asking the US Administration to stop viewing Pakistan as an ally and to end its Major Non-NATO ally status.
- After almost two years, Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA) met on 21 December. In a statement issued by the ISPR, the NCA reiterated that Pakistan was a responsible nuclear state and would continue its policy of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD), in line with a credible minimum deterrence principle, as required for strategic stability in the region – especially in the face of India's massive militarisation, including of the Indian Ocean region, and development of its Ballistic Missile Defence. The NCA also gave out that Pakistan "has the requisite credentials to become part of various non-proliferation regimes, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), for which Pakistan seeks adoption of a non-discriminatory criteria based approach."
- The meeting, allowed by Pakistan on humanitarian grounds, between convicted Indian spy-master Jadhav and his mother and wife took place on 25 December. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Indian Deputy High Commissioner accompanied the family members but neither him nor any other Indian official was allowed to meet Jadhav. After the meeting the Indian government and media went into a hysterical anti-Pakistan campaign accusing the Pakistan government of insulting the family and its religious

symbols and so on. So any gains Pakistan had expected in diplomatic terms were not going to come from the Indian side despite this major concession by Pakistan in allowing the meeting of the family.

- In a move to find a new approach to resolving Pak-Afghan differences a China-Pakistan-Afghanistan trilateral dialogue was set in motion with the first meeting held in Beijing on 26 December. The hostile rhetoric from the Afghan side against Pakistan toned down considerably as a result of this dialogue but this process, which leaves out the US, will not sit comfortably with the Trump Administration.
- On 30 December, the Palestinian Authority (PA) recalled its Ambassador to Pakistan, Walid Abu Ali, after India objected to his presence and address at a rally on Jerusalem hosted by, amongst others, Hafiz Saeed of the JuD – an UNSC-banned terrorist organisation.

International

- India's growing militarisation was reflected in its third successful test of its Advanced Air Defence (AAD) supersonic interceptor missile on 28 December. This is part of India's efforts to have a comprehensive multi-layer Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system.
- In the 2017 NSS announced by President Trump on 18 December, India's role as a leading great power was once again highlighted – a policy that began after 9/11 as a key component of the US global strategic design. The new NSS envisages a deepening American strategic partnership with India and US support for India's leadership role not only in its region but also throughout the broader Indian Ocean region.
- In the same NSS, Trump's theme was "America First" and he targeted past US foreign policy failures. He also identified China and Russia as the primary threats to US economic dominance, calling them "rival powers" and seen as "revisionist" in their aims, but with whom the US must build a "great partnership".
- The expanding strategic relationship between India and Israel was reflected in the news report in *Times of India*, on 28 December, that Israel had permitted Indian petroleum companies to explore oil and gas in its waters. This development follows Iran's refusal to award its Frazad-B oil fields to Indian consortiums.
- As acts of terrorism increased in Kabul in 2017 so did sectarian terrorist attacks. On 28 December, a bomb blast at a Shia cultural centre in Kabul killed 41 people and wounded 80.

- The Palestinian News Agency Wafa reported on 31 that the Palestinian Authority (PA) had temporarily recalled its Ambassador to the US, Husam Zomlot, for consultations.
- The civilian deaths in the Yemen crisis continue to increase as the Saudi-led coalition's air strikes hit civilian targets. On 28 December, Jamie McGoldrick, the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, said that 68 civilians were killed in one day, on 26 December, in two separate Saudi-led coalition airstrikes.
- On 18 December the US vetoed a UNSC Resolution rejecting Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and his plans to move the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.
- On 21 December, the United Nations General Assembly voted to denounce the Jerusalem move by the US as being null and void. It was a non-binding resolution, but despite US pressure, the Resolution entitled "Status of Jerusalem" sponsored by Egypt and co-sponsored by Pakistan, was passed by an overwhelming majority – 128 votes in favour and only 9 against (Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Togo and the US). 35 states abstained including Canada and Australia.
- With the increasing US belligerency and disregard for human rights, it seems Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, High Commissioner of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has decided not to seek a second term after his term ends in summer 2018 – according to *Foreign Policy* on December 20. He felt his voice would be silenced at a time when the US and other world powers are retreating from their historical commitment to human rights. He sent an email to his Organisation's employees' stating: "Next year will be the last of my mandate. After reflection, I have decided not to seek a second four-year term. To do so, in the current geopolitical context, might involve bending a knee in supplication; muting a statement of advocacy; lessening the independence and integrity of my voice – which is your voice."
- After the Myanmar government refused to give access to Yanghee Lee, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, on 20 December, Lee expressed disappointment at the decision and said it was indicative of "something terribly awful happening in Rakhine, as well as in the rest of the country."

In a related development, on 18 December 2017, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, High Commissioner of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human

Rights, stated Myanmar had clearly “planned” the violent attacks on its Rohingya minority, which could possibly amount to genocide.

- The Japanese government is using North Korea as a reason for building up its military arsenal. On 19 December, the Japanese cabinet approved purchase of two Aegis Ashore land-based interception systems from the US. In addition, Japan was also planning to acquire medium range cruise missiles. This would mark a significant shift from Japan’s post-war pacifist approach by giving Japan first-strike capability. Russia reacted negatively to this move saying deployment of the US missile defence system would have a negative impact on relations between Japan and Russia. Russia believes the Aegis Ashore system acquisition by Japan would represent a new violation of the INF Treaty.

--- Dr Shireen M Mazari

Director General

AMERICAS

Domestic

- According to reports on December 29, bitter cold continues to engulf the northern United States and Canada as forecasters warn that the deep freeze will continue into the beginning of 2018.

The US state of Minnesota saw temperatures drop to as low as -38.3 while temperatures in New Hampshire dropped to -36.6 degrees centigrade. According to officials parts of Canada are colder than the North Pole or Mars. President Donald Trump used the cold snap to reiterate his outspoken views on climate change, suggesting on Twitter that the eastern US “could use a little bit of that good old global warming.”

- According to the White House, on December 29, it is ready to begin talks with Republican and Democratic Congressional leaders on immigration policy, government spending and other issues that need to be wrapped up early in 2018.

Trump’s Republican Party wants to maintain control of Congress ahead of the November 2018 Congressional Election even as the Democrats are looking for openings to gain seats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. According to the White House, Trump’s Budget Chief Mick Mulvaney and Legislative Affairs Director Marc Short will meet with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan and their Democratic counterparts, Senator Chuck Schumer and Representative Nancy Pelosi. This would be followed up with a weekend of strategy sessions for Trump, McConnell and Ryan on January 6 and 7, 2018 at Camp David. The Congress passed a short-term government-funding bill before taking its Christmas break, but needs to come to an agreement on defence spending and various domestic programmes by January 19, 2018 or the government will shut down.

- On December 22, the US Congress averted a shutdown of the federal government, narrowly passing a temporary spending bill.

The Congress had until midnight on December 22, 2017 to pass a “continuing resolution” to keep government operations running. The House bill was passed by 231-188 and the Senate bill by 66-32. The “concerted Republican effort will push the deadline back by funding the government through January 19, 2018.” The bill passed mostly on party lines with 13 Democrats in the House voting to fund the government and only 16 Republicans voting against it. In the Senate, the 60-vote threshold was passed with the help of Democrats in more conservative states.

- On December 29, President Trump demanded that Democrats approve a wall along the border with Mexico and other programmes to tighten immigration before he supports

DACA.

Promoting his agenda and attacking critics on Twitter, the President tweeted, “The Democrats have been told, and fully understand, that there can be no DACA without the desperately needed WALL at the Southern Border and an END to the horrible Chain Migration & ridiculous Lottery System of Immigration etc. We must protect our Country at all cost!” DACA or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is a programme designed to protect young people brought into the US illegally as children. It protected hundreds of thousands of young people brought into the country illegally by their parents. Trump has vowed to end the programme after March 1, 2018 unless Congress approves new border enforcement issues. According to the Democrats, ending DACA would lead to deportations of productive young people. They also argue that the proposed wall along the US-Mexico border would do nothing to stop illegal immigration. He also criticised the US postal system and Amazon. He tweeted, “Why is the United States Post Office, which is losing many billions of dollars a year, while charging Amazon and others so little to deliver their packages, making Amazon richer and the Post Office dumber and poorer? Should be charging MUCH MORE!” Critics were quick to point out that Amazon creator Jeff Bezos also owns The Washington Post, another frequent target of Trump complaints.

- On December 28, the Alabama State Canvassing Board certified the results of the December 12, 2017 special election for the US Senate seat vacated by Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

The certification follows an attempt by former Republican candidate Roy Moore to freeze the Canvassing Board’s proceedings. Moore filed a lawsuit on December 21, 2017 requesting a temporary restraining order to stop official certification. A judge struck down the lawsuit shortly before the certification.

- According to the *BBC* on December 23, the FBI arrested Everitt Aaron Jameson, a former marine on suspicion of planning a terror attack in San Francisco over Christmas.

Jameson was held after allegedly discussing the plot with undercover FBI agents. Criminal documents allege he planned to target the Pier 39 area. Authorities say firearms; a will and a letter claiming the attack were found during a search of his home. The FBI criminal complaint says that the Muslim convert’s letter made reference to Donald Trump’s decision to designate Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

- On December 22, the State Department told refugee agencies it would sharply reduce the number of offices across the US authorised to resettle people in 2018 as President Donald Trump cuts the number of refugees allowed into the country.

The decision would likely lead to the closure of numerous resettlement offices around the country. It would leave some refugees without access to services that help them integrate into American life. Refugee resettlement in the United States is handled by nine non-profit agencies that receive funding from the federal government for some of their work. They partner with hundreds of local offices in nearly every state that help new arrivals with basic tasks like enrolling children in school, arranging doctors' visits and applying for Social Security cards and other documents.

- On December 20, Senate Republicans passed a sweeping overhaul of the US tax code.

The Senate approved the \$1.5 trillion tax bill, by a final vote of 51-48. Once enacted, the legislation will represent the most drastic changes to the US tax code since 1986. It includes permanent tax breaks for corporations and temporary tax cuts for individuals, The bill was passed along party lines, with every Senate Republican present voting in its favour and all Democrats voting against it. Arizona senator John McCain, who is undergoing treatment for brain cancer, was the lone member to be absent for the vote.

International

- Citing a December 30, 2017 *NY Times* report on December 31, the *BBC* reported that the investigation into possible connections between Russia and Donald Trump's presidential campaign began after a tip-off from Australia.

*Trump adviser George Papadopoulos allegedly told Australia's top UK diplomat that Moscow had incriminating dirt on Hillary Clinton. The newspaper asserted that the revelation came "during a night of heavy drinking" in London in May 2016. Australia later informed the FBI. According to the report, the exchange led to the secret investigation into possible connections between Russia and the Trump campaign in July 2016. The story cites four anonymous American and Australian foreign officials "with direct knowledge of the Australian's role" as its source. The *BBC* said however that it had not independently verified the report.*

- According to the *NY Times* on December 29, the US might withhold \$255 million in aid from Pakistan.

The Trump Administration is considering withholding the aid to Pakistan as a show of dissatisfaction with Islamabad's failure to act against terrorist networks operating in the country. Announcing his national security strategy, President Trump singled out Pakistan for criticism. "We make massive payments every year to Pakistan," he said. "They have to help." Vice President Mike Pence reinforced that message during his visit to Afghanistan before Christmas, telling American troops that "President Trump has put Pakistan on notice." The Pentagon has

historically been one of Pakistan's defenders in Washington because of its longstanding ties to the Pakistani military. According to observers, Pakistan has few friends in Trump's National Security Council. Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster "saw firsthand how Pakistan meddled in its neighbor's affairs." Lisa Curtis, the council's senior director for South and Central Asia, brought critical views about Pakistan from her previous post at the conservative Heritage Foundation. In a February 2017 she co-authored with Husain Haqqani, Pakistan's former Ambassador to Washington, the two called for the Administration to "avoid viewing and portraying Pakistan as an ally." If Pakistan did not take steps to show its commitment to America's counterterrorism goals, they said, Trump should strip it of its status as a major non-NATO ally.

- According to *Al Jazeera* on December 28, the US will reinstate full visa services for Turkish nationals.

The decision would end an almost two month long suspension that highlighted strained relations between the two countries. Based on assurances from the Turkish government, the US said it was "confident" that security had improved enough to warrant the "full resumption" of visa services at its embassy in Ankara, and its consulates across the country.

- On December 22, the United Nations Security Council imposed fresh sanctions on North Korea.

Proposed by the United States and adopted by a vote of 15 to 0, the sanctions significantly choke off fuel supplies and order North Koreans working overseas to return home. According to observers, the sanctions may prove to be the last test of whether any amount of economic pressure can force the North to halt its nuclear weapons programme. In what is being termed as a striking display of unity, China and Russia joined in the vote, only after the Trump Administration agreed to soften a couple of the provisions.

- On December 18, the United Nations Security Council demanded that the Trump Administration rescind its decisions to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and to shift the United States Embassy there.

US Ambassador, Nikki R. Haley, vetoed the demand. It was the first time in six years that the United States used its veto power in the Council. Even America's staunchest allies voted in favour of the resolution. They warned that Trump's December 6, 2017 announcement about Jerusalem, "threatened to subvert the effort to solve one of the world's most intractable conflicts." Ignoring the outcome however, Haley called the vote "an embarrassment" arguing that Trump's decision was "US recognition of the obvious."

- According to *USA Today* on December 18, the US and Iraq have intensified talks to keep

an ongoing American military presence in the country following the ouster of the Islamic State.

Both countries want to avoid a repeat of 2011, when American forces withdrew from Iraq after successfully weakening al-Qaeda and driving down violence in the country. By 2015, the Iraqi military collapsed in the face of an Islamic State invasion.

The two sides have yet to determine the size and the composition of the force, which could change over time.

- On December 19, the US and UK governments held North Korea responsible for the WannaCry malware attack affecting hospitals, businesses and banks across the world earlier in 2017.

The attack is said to have hit more than 300,000 computers in 150 nations, causing billions of dollars of damage. It is the first time the US and UK have officially blamed North Korea for the worm. Thomas Bossert, an aide to US President Donald Trump, first made the accusation in the Wall Street Journal. Bossert said the allegation was “based on evidence”. He did not produce any evidence in the article, but said US findings concurred with judgements from other governments and private companies. He added that Australia, Canada and New Zealand also share the US conclusion that North Korea was behind the attack. Following the interview, the UK Foreign Office also blamed “North Korean actors using their cyber programme to circumvent sanctions.”

- On December 18, US President Donald Trump outlined his new National Security Strategy.

Trump identified China and Russia as the primary threats to US economic dominance. His speech was based on his “America First” platform as he attacked the “failures” of past foreign policy. He criticised Pakistan and North Korea, and how previous administrations approached other world powers. Russia and China are “rival powers” he said, but the US must attempt to build a “great partnership with them.” However, the National Security Strategy document itself was far more critical as it called China and Russia revisionist powers. The 68-page document, which White House officials began work on 11 months ago, suggests a return to Trump’s campaign promises. It explicitly states, “the United States will no longer turn a blind eye to violations, cheating or economic aggression.”

Latin America

- On December 25, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked Guatemala with a “God bless you” for deciding to move its embassy to Jerusalem.

- On December 24 Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales said he had chosen to relocate his country's embassy from Tel Aviv.

The Palestinians said Guatemala was “on the wrong side of history”. Guatemala and neighboring Honduras were two of only a handful of countries to join the United States, which has pledged to move its embassy to Jerusalem, in voting against the UN resolution.

---Amina Afzal

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On December 28, India successfully test-fired its indigenously developed Advanced Air Defence (AAD) supersonic interceptor missile from a test range in Odisha.

Indian Defence Ministry said, "Today's test was conducted to validate various parameters of the interceptor in flight mode and it was all success." The Ministry called the interception a "direct hit and grand success." This was the third successful test of the AAD interceptor missile in 2017 in which an incoming ballistic missile target was successfully intercepted, within 30 km altitude of the earth's atmosphere. The earlier two tests were conducted on March 1 and February 11, 2017, as part of efforts to have a full-fledged multi-layer Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system. India's BMD system is based on the Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV) missile and the AAD missile designed to provide a high and low altitude defence against incoming ballistic missiles. The PDV is capable of intercepting missiles at exo-atmospheric altitudes of 50 to 80km, while the AAD is designed to operate at endo-atmospheric altitudes of up to 30kms. In a related development on December 17, 2017, India failed in successfully launching its indigenously developed K-4 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) from a submerged pontoon. According to media reports, the K-4 missile did not activate during the test. The K-4 SLBM has a strike range of approximately 3,500 kilometres and is believed to be equipped on the Indian Navy's Arihant-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), the INS Arihant and the INS Arighat.

- On December 27, Sergei Chemezov, Head of Russian state conglomerate Rostec, said that Russia would supply S-400 missile defence system to Turkey.

The first deliveries of the system would begin in 2020. Chemezov said that a \$2.5 billion deal for four batteries of S-400 surface-to-air missiles between Turkey and Russia is almost complete. He noted that Turkey would pay 45% of the cost. Russia would give loans to the country in order to cover the remaining 55% of the cost. He said the Russian and Turkish Finance Ministries had already completed talks on financing the deal. Turkish Defence Minister Nurettin Canikli also confirmed the procurement of the system from Russia. The S-400 system has a range of up to 400 kilometres and can simultaneously engage multiple targets. It is capable of shooting down ballistic missile warheads along with aircraft and cruise missiles.

- On December 22, the UNSC imposed new sanctions on North Korea over the country's latest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test, restricting Pyongyang's oil supplies vital for its missile and nuclear programmes.

The UNSC unanimously adopted a US-drafted resolution by a vote of 15 to 0. The resolution sought to ban nearly 90% of refined petroleum product exports to North Korea by capping them at 500,000 barrels a year and demanded the repatriation of North Koreans working abroad within 12 months. It would also cap crude oil supplies to North Korea at 4 million barrels a year. These measures were adopted in response to North Korea's test of an ICBM on November

28, 2017, that marked an advance in Pyongyang's delivery capabilities to threaten the US mainland with a nuclear strike. The resolution was tabled by the US on December 21, 2017, following the country's negotiations with China. The latest sanctions are the third round of sanctions imposed on North Korea by the UNSC in 2017. Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the UN, said, "The new sanctions are a reflection of the international outrage at the Kim regime's actions. The resolution sends the unambiguous message to Pyongyang that further defiance will invite further punishment and isolation." In response, North Korea condemned the adoption of the resolution and called it an "act of war," on December 24, 2017. North Korea's Foreign Ministry said, "We fully reject the latest UN sanctions... as a violent breach of our republic's sovereignty and an act of war that destroys the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula and a wider region." The Ministry added, "The US and its puppet followers should never forget the newly-upgraded status of our nation as a nation that could pose a real nuclear threat to the US mainland."

- On December 21, Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA) said that Pakistan was a responsible nuclear state and would continue with its policy of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) to meet security challenges and for maintaining strategic stability in the region.

The NCA held its 23rd meeting under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, following a hiatus of almost two years. According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the NCA considered the regional security environment and noted with concern certain destabilising actions including massive arms build-up, nuclearisation of the Indian Ocean Region and plans for the development / deployment of BMD in Pakistan's neighbourhood. The statement said, "The NCA reiterated Pakistan's policy of developing and maintaining FSD, in line with the policy of Credible Minimum Deterrence and avoidance of arms race." While expressing full confidence in Pakistan's capability to address any form of aggression, the NCA also appreciated the technological sophistication demonstrated during the tests of Babur III submarine-launched cruise missile (SLCM) and Ababeel ballistic missile, capable of delivering multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs). The NCA also reaffirmed that, as a responsible nuclear state, Pakistan would continue to contribute meaningfully towards global efforts to improve nuclear security and nuclear non-proliferation measures. The statement said that the NCA "reiterated that Pakistan has the requisite credentials to become part of various non-proliferation regimes, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), for which Pakistan seeks adoption of a non-discriminatory criteria based approach."

- On December 19, the Japanese Cabinet approved purchase of two Aegis Ashore land-based interception systems from the US in a response to growing threats from North Korea.

A statement issued by the Cabinet said, “North Korea’s nuclear and missile development has become a greater and more imminent threat for Japan’s national security, and we need to drastically improve our ballistic missile defence capability to protect Japan continuously and sustainably.” Itsunori Onodera, Japan’s Defence Minister, said that Japan would buy two Aegis Ashore land-based systems to add to its SM-3 guided missiles launched by Aegis-equipped destroyers and Patriot Advanced Capability-3 missiles. However, he did not discuss details of the Aegis Ashore deployment areas in the country. According to media reports, Aegis Ashore systems would be deployed at two bases in northern and south-western Japan, which could cost the country \$1.8 billion. The two systems are expected to be operational by 2023. Besides the acquisition of missile defence systems, Onodera said Japan would also acquire medium-range cruise missiles that could be launched at North Korean targets from fighter planes if an attack appeared to be imminent. The procurement of cruise missiles would mark a significant shift from Japan’s strictly defensive post-war posture to carrying out pre-emptive strikes at enemy targets. Japan’s first-strike capability violates Japan’s post-war renunciation of force as a means of settling international disputes as enshrined in the country’s constitution.

In response, Maria Zakharova, Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said on December 21, 2017, that the deployment of the US missile defence system would have a negative impact on relations between Tokyo and Moscow. On December 30, 2017, Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov also accused the US of violating the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty by selling a missile defence system to Japan. Ryabkov said, “The US is deploying them (missile defence systems) at their military bases in Romania and Poland, that is near our western borders, which goes against the 1987 INF Treaty banning the deployment of such systems on the ground.” He added, “The fact that such complexes could now appear on Russia’s eastern borders creates a situation that we cannot ignore in our military planning.” Russia believes that the Aegis Ashore system is also capable of using attack weapons and its deployment in Japan represents a new violation of the INF Treaty. The INF Treaty required both the US and Russia to destroy their stockpiles of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometres. The treaty, which covers both nuclear and conventionally armed missiles, also prohibits signatories from possessing, producing, and flight-testing these kinds of missiles.

- On December 19, Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told the UNSC that the UN Secretariat is not yet in a position to confirm whether the ballistic missiles launched at the Saudi cities of Yanbu and Riyadh were Iranian Qiam-1 missiles.
- On December 18, Iran said it wants to examine missile parts that Nikki Haley, displayed on December 15, 2017, as an “undeniable” evidence of Iran supplying Houthi rebels with ballistic missiles.

Feltman presented to the UNSC the main findings of the UN Secretary-General’s fourth report on the implementation of the provisions contained in annex B to Resolution 2231, endorsing

Iran's July 2015 Nuclear Agreement, also known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Feltman said the report contained preliminary observations indicating that the two missiles launched at the Saudi cities of Yanbu and Riyadh had similar features which suggested a common origin, and are consistent with missiles of the Scud family and had features known to be consistent with the Qiam-1 missile. However, he said that the UN Secretariat could not confirm the transfer of ballistic missiles. In terms of restrictions on arms-related transfers, the Secretariat is confident that close to 900 of the assault rifles seized by the US in March 2016 are of Iranian origin and shipped from Iran to Houthi rebels in Yemen. Regarding the supply, sale or transfer to Iran of nuclear-related items, Feltman said that the Secretary-General has not received any report of such flows. He mentioned that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had reported to the UNSC nine times that Iran is adhering to its nuclear-related obligations, since the implementation of the nuclear agreement in 2016. He also expressed concerns over US President Donald Trump's decision not to certify to Congress that Iran was complying with the agreement in October 2017. He said, "This decision has regrettably created considerable uncertainty about the future of the JCPOA." In a related development on December 18, 2017, Defence Minister General Amir Hatami said that Iran would file a complaint to the UN and demand that "parts of the missile be delivered to Iran" for examination. Hatami said, "Enemies of the Islamic Republic can claim many things, but following Iran's complaint, debris of the missile should be given to Iran to examine it and announce its final analysis about it." Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif also announced that his country lodged a complaint with the UN protesting Haley's press conference in which she presented "irrefutable evidence" that Iran sent weapons to Houthis in Yemen. Zarif called the missile show "a piece of metal" and said Haley's accusations were "unfounded".

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA, EAST ASIA & PACIFIC

China

- On December 29, China rejected allegations by the US that it helped North Korea evade UN sanctions. The remarks came in the aftermath of claims by US President Donald Trump that Beijing had allowed the transfer of oil to a North Korean ship.

Responding to Trump's statement, China's Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Hua Chunying said, "The recent series of reports on this situation do not conform with the facts." She said that Beijing does not permit its "citizens or companies to engage in any activities that violate" UN resolutions. On December 28, 2017, US President Donald Trump said he was "very disappointed" that China was "allowing oil to go into North Korea" and said such moves would prevent "a friendly solution" to the crisis over Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

- On December 19, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hua Chunying urged the US to stop deliberately distorting its strategic intentions and to abandon the Cold War mentality and the outdated concept of zero-sum game.

Hua Chunying made the remarks in response to the newly released US National Security Strategy report on December, 18, 2017. The report referred to China and Russia as "revisionist powers," and listed them as "competitors" seeking to alter the status quo that favours the United States. According to the report, both China and Russia are regarded as rival powers that are eroding US security and prosperity, and challenging the US-defined global order. According to Hua, China would never seek development at the expense of other countries' interests, and would also never give up its own legitimate rights and interests.

Taiwan

- On December 29, President Tsai Ing-wen said that China's military ambitions are becoming more apparent and tension between Taiwan and the mainland must not be resolved through military force.

Earlier in December 2017, Taiwan's Defence Ministry warned that China's military threat was growing by the day, with the Chinese air force carrying out 16 rounds of exercises close to Taiwan over the past year. Beijing insist that the drills are a routine matter.

North Korea

- On December 30, North Korea's state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), citing a report titled "No Force Can Prevail over Independence and Justice," said that Pyongyang would continue to develop its nuclear programme, declaring the country as an "invincible" nuclear power.

The report stressed that North Korea would “continue bolstering the capabilities for self-defense and preemptive attack with the nuclear force as the pivot, as long as the US and its vassal forces persist in nuclear threat.” The KCNA praised the country’s nuclear achievements in 2017 and said Pyongyang would “deal with the US’s most ferocious declaration of war with fire surely and definitely.”

- On December 24, North Korea’s Foreign Ministry termed the latest sanctions of the UN Security Council (UNSC) against Pyongyang as “an act of war” and vowed to consolidate its nuclear programme.

Pyongyang said new measures proposed by the US infringe North Korea’s sovereignty and violate peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. On December 22, 2017, the Security Council unanimously voted to impose tough sanctions on North Korea in response to its latest missile test and vowed to prevent Pyongyang from furthering its nuclear programme. The measures order North Koreans working abroad to return home within two years and ban nearly 90 percent of refined petroleum exports to the country.

South Korea

- *Yonhap news* reported on December 31 that South Korea seized a Panama-flagged vessel suspected of shipping oil products to North Korea in breach of international embargoes enforced against Pyongyang.

The media report further said that the vessel crew was mostly from China and Myanmar, adding that South Korean authorities were carrying out an investigation into the ship.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

EUROPE

- On December 30, the Chairman of the UK Government's Infrastructure Commission said he had been forced to resign as an independent advisor after PM Theresa May's government "tried to silence" him.

The former Labour Minister quit with an attack on the May government. He said it had become "hyper sensitive to any criticism" and that Brexit was negatively affecting the whole conduct of government including infrastructure.

- On December 30, Russian authorities arrested a suspect they believe carried out the December 27, 2017 bombing of a supermarket in St. Petersburg that was claimed by the Islamic State (IS).

The Federal Security Service (FSB) said it had detained both the "organiser and executor" of the blast. The bombing at the Perekrestok branch injured 13 people. IS has not released evidence proving it was behind the attack. The FSB did not name the suspect however.

- On December 27, at least 10 people were injured in an explosion at a supermarket in the Russian city of St. Petersburg.

One person was said to be in serious condition after the detonation of an improvised explosive device (IED). President Vladimir Putin described the blast, at the Perekrestok supermarket chain as a terrorist act. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, which officials say, produced a blast equivalent to 200g of TNT.

- On December 29, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said the new Catalan parliament should hold its first session on January 17, 2018 ahead of reinstating the region's government.

Rajoy's announcement comes a week after Catalonia's separatist parties won back a majority in a divisive snap election. Rajoy called the vote in a bid to suppress calls for independence by the region's leaders and to end the political crisis. Analysts say it could take months for a new Catalan government to be formed however.

- On December 22, Catalonia's ousted leader, Carles Puigdemont, called for fresh talks with Spain after separatist parties won a slim majority in a regional election.

Puigdemont said he wanted the negotiations in Brussels, where he is living in self-imposed exile, or another EU country. Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy rejected the idea. He said he would hold talks with the head of the new Catalan government but that leader would have to take up their post in Catalonia itself. He also added that the winner of the December 18, 2017 election was Inés

Arrimadas, the leader of the Citizens party, which wants Catalonia to remain a semi-autonomous part of Spain.

- On December 28, Italian President Sergio Mattarella dissolved parliament, announcing general elections on March 4, 2018.

The government met after the decree was announced, and confirmed the election date. The ruling centre-left Democratic Party (PD) faces a strong challenge from the anti-establishment Five Star (M5S) and right-wing Forza Italia, who want tough measures to curb immigration. The influx of migrants mostly from sub-Saharan Africa remains a major issue for the country. Paolo Gentiloni is the third Prime Minister to have served in the outgoing legislature, elected in 2013.

- According to German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, on December 26, a “smart” Brexit deal could serve as a model for the EU’s future relations with other non-EU states including Turkey and Ukraine.

He said he did not see either joining the EU any time soon, so alternative forms of closer co-operation were needed. The UK’s future relationship with the EU, which it is due to leave on March 29, 2019, is still being negotiated. Earlier the two sides agreed on the three “divorce” issues that took up the first phase of negotiations including how much the UK owes the EU, what happens to the Northern Ireland border and what happens to UK citizens living elsewhere in the EU and EU citizens living in the UK.

- On December 27, Ukraine and separatist rebels in the east of the country exchanged hundreds of prisoners, in one of the biggest swaps since the conflict began in 2014.

Some 230 people were sent to rebel-held areas in return for 74 prisoners who had been held by pro-Russia rebels in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. It was the first swap in 15 months. The release and exchange of prisoners was one of the points in the Minsk Peace Agreement of 2015. The deal has stalled since and analysts say the swap does not signify wider progress.

- During Christmas Eve Mass on December 24, Pope Francis urged Roman Catholics not to ignore the plight of millions of migrants “driven from their land.”

The Pope recounted the Biblical story of how Mary and Joseph travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem but found no place to stay. A major theme of his papacy has been defending migrants around the world.

- On December 24, Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny said he has gathered enough nominations to challenge Vladimir Putin in the March 2018 Presidential Election.

His supporters met in 20 cities across the country to secure the signatures. However, Navalny is unlikely to run as election officials ruled him ineligible because of a corruption conviction, which he says is politically motivated. Navalny is widely regarded as the only candidate with a chance

of challenging the President, who is seeking a fourth term that would see him become the longest-serving Russian leader since Joseph Stalin.

- According to *The Guardian* on December 22, Britain and other European nations are under increasing pressure to explain why they are sending hundreds of Afghans back to Afghanistan.

Questions are being raised about whether the EU tied a 2016 aid package for Afghanistan to its willingness to take back refused asylum seekers. Since the deal, forced repatriations have accelerated. According to the International Organisation for Migration at least 500 Afghans have been forcibly removed back to Afghanistan in 2017 compared to 200 in 2017. Another 3,000 have returned voluntarily during 2017. As of September 2017, Afghans accounted for the largest number of asylum applications in the EU, with 170,045 pending cases. However, they lose more than 50% of asylum appeals compared to Syrians because some parts of the country, such as the capital, Kabul, are now considered safe.

- The European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled on December 20 that Uber is officially a transport company and not a digital service.

Uber argued it was an information society service helping people to make contact with each other electronically and not a cab firm. The case arose after Uber was told to obey local taxi rules in Barcelona. Uber said the verdict would make little difference to the way it operated in Europe, but experts say the case could have implications for the gig economy.

- According to the *BBC* on December 20, the Bank of England will unveil plans allowing European banks to operate in the UK “as normal post-Brexit.”

EU banks operating through branches would be able to continue without creating subsidiaries, which is an expensive process. Branches offer an easy way for banks to move money around their international operations. However, they present the risk that, in the event of a financial crisis, funds are quickly repatriated to the foreign bank's headquarters – leaving customers of the UK branch out of pocket.

- On December 16, Austria’s President approved a coalition government between the conservative People’s Party and the far-right Freedom Party.

The deal will make Austria the only Western European state with a governing far-right party, which is opposed to migration and the EU. The parties previously governed the country together between 2000 and 2005. The People’s Party’s Sebastian Kurz is set to become the world’s youngest head of government.

- On December 16 European right-wing leaders, including Marine Le Pen of France and Dutch politician Geert Wilders, held a meeting in Prague.

The meeting was hosted by the Czech Republic's Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party, which won nearly 11 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections in October based on an anti-Islam and anti-immigrant platform. Notwithstanding the Czech Republic's increasingly right-leaning government, large crowds of booing protestors greeted those attending the two-day conference.

---Amina Afzal

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Bahrain

- According to *Bahrain News Agency (BNA)*, on December 25, Bahrain's top military court sentenced six men to death after convicting them of charges including plotting to assassinate the Armed Forces Chief, Field Marshal Sheikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa.

It was the first official mention of any murder plot against the country's Army Chief, who is a member of the ruling family. According to sources, the people sentenced to death were Shias. Bahrain has seen unrest for years as its Sunni royal family has resisted demands from its Shia majority for a constitutional monarchy with an elected prime minister. According to BNA, one of the convicted was a serving soldier and that all six were also stripped of their citizenship. The court sentenced seven other defendants to seven-year jail terms and deprived them of their citizenship. Five men were acquitted. Since crushing Shia-led street protests in 2011, Bahraini authorities have cracked down on all dissent, banning both religious and secular opposition parties and jailing hundreds.

Iran

- On December 25, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Dr Ali Ardeshir Larijani denied the impression that Tehran was backing Yemeni rebels in their armed campaign against Saudi Arabia.

Larijani denied that Iran had supplied missiles to the Houthis in Yemen. He said, "They are fighting by themselves". Riyadh has accused Houthi rebels of firing at least three ballistic missiles at the Kingdom in December 2017, terming them 'acts of war'. However, all the missiles were intercepted before they could cause any major damage. Talking about the recently concluded Speakers' Conference held in Islamabad, which was attended by top parliamentarians from six countries, Larijani said it would contribute towards strengthening economic ties and regional cooperation against terrorism. He said, "Consultations regarding ways to counter terrorism have always been useful." He also hailed Pakistani Army Chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa's recent visit to Tehran and hoped that it would prove useful in promoting bilateral relations.

Palestine

- On December 22, Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas said that he would 'no longer accept' any peace plan proposed by the US.

Abbas made these comments during a press conference with French President, Emmanuel Macron in Paris. He said, "The United States has proven to be a dishonest mediator in the peace process and we will no longer accept any plan from it." Macron also condemned the US decision on Jerusalem. However, he also ruled out recognising Palestine as a state unilaterally. Earlier, on December 21, the 193-member General Assembly adopted a resolution by 128 to nine, with 35 abstentions, that rejected the US decision on Jerusalem and declared the unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital null and void. Abbas welcomed the UN vote as a victory for the Palestinian cause. The Middle Eastern and European diplomats are also pessimistic about the Trump Administration's peace plan, which is being prepared behind closed doors and will be presented to both sides in 2018. According to Riyadh Mansour, the Palestinian envoy to the UN, the defeat for Washington despite threats that it might cut off funding for the UN or to countries that voted against its decision was a 'massive setback'. Abbas criticised US' efforts to intimidate countries. Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the UN vote showed the 'illegality' of Trump's decision, urging the US to withdraw it. According to observers, Abbas's visit to Paris less than a fortnight after Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu's visit has raised speculation about whether Macron might be tempted to mediate in the conflict. Egypt drafted the measure in the UN General Assembly urging nations to support the UN resolutions dating to 1967 when Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan. The Resolutions declared Jerusalem a disputed territory whose status was to be decided through negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Egypt is the second closest US ally in the Middle East after Israel and also a major recipient of US aid. Pakistan co-sponsored the move, although US relations with Pakistan were already tense before the UN vote.

- According to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa on December 31, the Palestinian Authority (PA) temporarily recalled its Ambassador to the US, Husam Zomlot, for consultations.

According to the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Riyad al-Malki, discussions would take place "to set the decisions needed by the Palestinian leadership in the coming period regarding our relations with the US". He also said that the envoy is expected to return to "his normal work" after the discussions.

- Earlier, on December 30, the Palestinian Authority (PA) recalled its Ambassador to Pakistan, Walid Abu Ali, after he attended a rally in support of Palestine's position on Jerusalem hosted by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed.

The Palestinian Ambassador also addressed the crowd at the rally. Following his speech, Abu Ali told Al Jazeera, "All Pakistani people from all walks of life have strongly rejected Trump's decision of recognising Jerusalem as the Israeli capital." According to the Palestinian Foreign Ministry, Abu Ali's participation in the rally was "an unintentional mistake, but not justified". The PA's decision followed India's protest against the Ambassador's presence at the rally, terming it "unacceptable". The statement from the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said, "The

spokesman for the Palestinian Foreign Ministry stresses the commitment of the State of Palestine and its keenness to maintain good relations with the friendly Republic of India, as well as its support for the efforts of the Republic of India in its war against terrorism. The State of Palestine stands with the Republic of India in dealing with terrorist threats.” Hafiz Saeed has been repeatedly accused by the US and India of masterminding the 2008 attacks on Mumbai.

Saudi Arabia

- On December 19, Saudi Arabia intercepted a ballistic missile over Riyadh fired from Yemen by Houthi rebels who announced that the target was the official residence of King Salman.

Saudi Arabia and the US have accused Iran of supplying weapons to the Houthis, and Riyadh described the latest missile as ‘Iranian-Houthi’. According to Turki al-Maliki, the Spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, “The missile was aimed at populated residential areas in the Riyadh area, and thank God was intercepted and destroyed south of Riyadh without any casualties”. He also said, “The possession of Iranian manufactured ballistic weapons by terrorist organisations, including the Iran-backed Houthi militia, is a threat to regional and international security.”

Syria

- On December 28, the US-led coalition fighting in Syria and Iraq acknowledged the deaths of 16 more civilians in air strikes, increasing the toll of civilians killed in three years to at last 817.

According to the coalition, in November 2017, it had completed a review of 101 reports of potential civilian casualties, of which 92 were deemed non-credible. The remaining nine, relating to strikes between March 20 and October 17, 2017, were considered credible and resulted in 11 civilian casualties. The coalition also added another five civilian casualties to its count, based on previous reports of attacks it had earlier said it was not responsible for. Coalition forces have conducted 28,562 strikes against Daesh in three years, resulting in 1,799 reports of potential civilian casualties of which only 208 were deemed credible. According to a recent New York Times survey in Iraq, 20% of coalition air strikes have resulted in civilian casualties, a much higher proportion than the coalition’s claimed 0.36%. According to a monitoring group, Airwars, the number of civilian deaths acknowledged by the US-led coalition is well below the true civilian toll of the bombing campaign, estimating that almost 6,000 innocent lives have been lost.

- On December 25, forty Syrian opposition groups rejected the Russian initiative for holding a congress in Sochi with the participation of Syria’s conflicting sides.

- On December 22, the 8th round of Syrian peace talks concluded in Astana without any tangible outcome.

The latest round of Astana talks focused on buffer zones, humanitarian aid and freeing prisoners. Russia, Iran and Turkey released a joint statement at the end of the meeting. The three countries announced that they would meet for a “national dialogue congress” in January 2018 in the Russian seaside resort of Sochi, to try to find a political solution to the Syrian conflict. According to the joint statement, the Sochi congress, scheduled for January 29-30, 2018 would include “the participation of all segments of the Syrian society.” The trio also called on representatives from the Syrian government and the anti-government opposition to actively cooperate. In response to the announcement, UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, who had attended the Astana meeting, said that the Sochi congress “should be assessed by its ability to contribute to and support the mandated political process under the UN in Geneva and the full implementation of resolution 2254.” The Syrian government immediately announced that it would attend the Sochi event. However, in a joint statement, the so-called Syrian opposition faction which also includes Ahrar al-Sham and US-backed Mutasem Brigades, said the congress is aimed at undermining parallel UN-backed Syrian peace talks in Geneva. The statement said, “We completely reject Russia’s attempt to circumvent the Geneva track. “We call on all forces to stand in one rank against these alarming dangers.” Both Russia and Iran back Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whereas Turkey advocates for Assad’s removal and supports the non-Kurdish Syrian opposition groups.

Turkey

- During his visit to Tunisia on December 27, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that a political solution to the Syrian conflict was impossible without the departure of President Bashar al-Assad.

Erdogan was in Tunisia to attend the Turkish-Tunisian economic forum. He was accompanied by a delegation of nine ministers and 200 businessmen. During a press conference following his meeting with his Tunisian counterpart, Beji Caid Essebsi, Erdogan said, “Bashar al-Assad is a terrorist... We cannot just say this person goes on doing this job. If we do then it’s unfair to the Syrians who have been killed.” Turkey has opposed Assad throughout the conflict, backing the opposition seeking to oust him and accusing Assad of war crimes. Erdogan and Essebsi said their nations would never accept changes to Jerusalem’s historic status after President Donald Trump’s recognition of the city as Israel’s capital. Erdogan said, “Jerusalem is our red line. Any steps against Jerusalem’s historic status and holiness are unacceptable.” He also that that his country would work towards international recognition of the Palestinian state and seek the

support of the European Union. He also vowed to help support Tunisia overcome economic hardships and combat extremism.

- On December 27, Turkish Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim visited Saudi Arabia and held talks with King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

According to Turkish officials, the leaders exchanged views on “regional challenges and problems.” They also emphasised the importance of Jerusalem’s status and the need for the Islamic world to act in unity to protect the rights of Palestinian brothers. According to the official Saudi Press Agency, Salman and Yildirim “reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries, means of enhancing them, and latest developments in the region”. Speaking to reporters in Riyadh, Yildirim said, “Cooperation between these two countries in every field is essential not only in terms of Turkey and Saudi Arabia, but also for regional and global peace.” According to Yildirim, the two sides also discussed developing bilateral trade and joint defence industry projects. Following his accession to power in 2015, King Salman sought to improve relations with Turkey to form a so-called Sunni axis against rival Iran. However, the Kingdom’s move to lead a four-nation boycott of Qatar and cut off ties with the Gulf state led to new tensions with Turkey.

- On December 24, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Khartoum and held talks with his Sudanese counterpart, Omar al-Bashir.

The two sides agreed to establish a strategic cooperation council and to increase trade ties. Following their meeting, Erdogan said the two countries aimed at boosting bilateral trade from its current value of \$500m a year to \$1bn initially and then \$10bn. He said, “We encourage businessmen to invest in Sudan.” According to Al Jazeera, talks between the two Presidents mostly focused on political and economic development. For his part, al-Bashir said Erdogan’s visit would boost ties between the two Muslim countries. The Presidents also discussed the issue of US President Donald Trump’s decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

- On December 21, Turkey summoned a senior UAE diplomat to complain about a tweet by the Emirati Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

Sheikh Abdullah retweeted a post on Twitter in which a user made allegations of historic misdoings by ‘ancestors of Erdogan’. The tweet alleged that a former Ottoman governor pillaged and kidnapped people from the pilgrimage city of Madina in the early 20th century. The Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned the Emirati charge d’affaires in Ankara and complained about the post. The tweet said, “Fahreddin Pasha-Medina governor from 1916 to 1919 committed a crime against the people of Medina by stealing their money, kidnapping them and putting them on trains that took them to Syria and Istanbul”. The user added, “Those are the ancestors of Erdogan and this is the history that they have with Arab Muslims. Erdogan reacted by telling the minister to ‘know your place’. His tweet said, “Know your place! It means you do not know this

country, you do not know Erdogan, you do not know about Erdogan's ancestors". Relations between the UAE and Turkey are marked with distrust as Ankara supports Qatar in its crisis with Gulf neighbours including the UAE.

In another development on December 27, 2017, UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash tweeted, "there was a need for Arab countries to rally around the 'Arab axis' of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The sectarian and partisan view is not an acceptable alternative, and the Arab world will not be led by Tehran or Ankara."

- On December 17, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed his hope that Turkey would soon be able to open an embassy to a Palestinian state in East Jerusalem.

Erdogan has sought to lead Islamic condemnation of US President Donald Trump's move on Jerusalem. During his speech to his ruling party in Karaman, Erdogan said, "Because it is under occupation we can't just go there and open an embassy. But, inshaAllah (God willing) those days are near and ... we will officially open our embassy there." Turkey currently has a general consulate in Jerusalem. Ankara has full diplomatic relations with Israel, and like all other nations, its embassy is in Tel Aviv. Erdogan again criticised US President Donald Trump's decision to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel and move the US embassy to the city. He said this decision signifies a 'Zionist and evangelist logic and understanding'. He said Jews had no right to 'appropriate' Jerusalem, which was the 'capital of Muslims'.

Yemen

- According to the UN humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, at least 68 Yemeni civilians were killed in two separate air raids by the Saudi-led Arab coalition in one day.

The first air strike hit a crowded popular market in Taz province, killing 54 civilians including eight children, and wounding 32 others. The second raid was in the Red Sea province of Hodeida and killed 14 people from the same family. According to McGoldrick, another 41 civilians were killed and 43 wounded over the previous 10 days of fighting. The Arab coalition intensified its air campaign against Houthis following missile interception near Riyadh by Saudi air defences. McGoldrick said, "I remind all parties to the conflict, including the Saudi-led coalition, of their obligations under International Humanitarian Law to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure and to always distinguish between civilian and military objects." He also said that the conflict in Yemen has no military solution and could be resolved only through negotiations.

--- Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA: (I)

Pakistan

External

- On December 30, the Palestinian government recalled its Ambassador to Pakistan, Walid Abu Ali saying his participation “in a rally in solidarity with Jerusalem in the presence of individuals accused of supporting terrorism is an unintended mistake, but not justified”.

The development came a day after Palestinian Ambassador, Walid Abu Ali attended the ‘Tahaffuz-i-Baitul Muqddas’ rally of Difa-i-Pakistan Council along with Jamaat ul Dawra (JuD) Chief, Hafiz Saeed. The rally was held in Rawalpindi in support of Palestine and to protest US President Donald Trump’s decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Following the rally, Indian government conveyed its concern to the Palestinian Ambassador to India, Adnan Abu Al Haijs, insisting that the presence of Walid Abu Ali with Hafiz Saeed in the rally was “unacceptable.”

- According to *Dawn* on December 27, a US drone strike near the Pak-Afghan border in Kurram Agency killed at least two suspected militants.

Earlier, on December 18, 2017, a US drone fired a missile at a compound in the Kurram Agency. The frequent US drone strikes came amid Pakistan Air Chief Marshal Sohail Aman’s warning earlier in December 2017, whereby he ordered the Air Force to shoot down any drones that enter the country’s airspace including ones belonging to the US.

- On December 26, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif visited Beijing to attend the first China-Afghanistan-Pakistan dialogue.

Following the talks, the Foreign Minister appreciated China’s effort in building mutual trust between Kabul and Islamabad. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying said the trilateral dialogue and cooperation does not “target any third party.” The second foreign ministers’ meeting will be held in Kabul in 2018.

- On December 25 convicted Indian spy, Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav’s mother and wife visited Islamabad and met him at Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The duration of the meeting between the spy and his family was 40-minute-long. Indian Deputy High Commissioner, J P. Singh, accompanied Jhadav’s family. However, neither Singh nor any other Indian official was allowed to meet him. The Government of Pakistan allowed Jadhav’s family to meet him on ‘humanitarian grounds.’ However, it has denied consular access to him insisting that the Vienna Convention does not apply to spies. Soon after the meeting, India’s External Affairs Ministry accused Pakistan of “intimidating” Jadhav’s family and alleged that Jadhav’s wife’s shoes had been removed during the security check and were not returned. Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry rejected the Indian claims and said the shoes were seized after a “metal chip” was found in one of her shoes, which was being analysed. Pakistani authorities insist that India had been already informed that the spy’s family would have to undergo security

clearance before the meeting could take place. This was the first meeting between Jadhav with his family since his arrest in March 2016.

- On December 18, the Trump Administration released the US National Security Strategy 2017, which called upon Pakistan, “to continue demonstrating that it is a responsible steward of its nuclear assets.”

Highlighting US interests in the region, the US National Security Strategy calls for preventing cross-border terrorism, which raises the prospect of military and nuclear tensions, and preventing nuclear weapons technology, and materials from falling into the hands of terrorists. The new strategy also highlights concerns on, “the prospect for an Indo-Pakistani military conflict that could lead to a nuclear exchange.” During his speech on National Security Strategy, Trump said, “while we desire continued partnership we must see decisive action against terrorist groups operating within Pakistan.” He added that Pakistan has to help us as it gets “massive payments every year” from the US.

Pakistan rejected the Trump Administration’s new Security Strategy insisting that it ignores the country’s efforts to curb terrorism and to promote peace and stability in the region. On Nuclear weapons, Pakistan reiterated that the security standards of its nuclear assets are “second to no other nuclear state.” Pakistan also reminded the US that India’s “unchecked brutalisation of the people of Indian Occupied Kashmir” and killing of civilians in the ceasefire violations is a threat to regional stability. The new US Security Strategy was also met with disappointment in China and Russia.

- On December 22, Pakistan’s Foreign Office while responding to US Vice President, Mike Pence’s remarks that the US has “put Pakistan on notice for providing safe haven to the Taliban,” said that the statement was at “variance” with the recent “extensive conversations” Pakistan had with the US Administration.

The Foreign Office also said, “Allies do not put each other on notice”. Pence’s remarks came during an unannounced trip to Afghanistan. The US-Pak relations continue to spiral downwards with both sides blaming each other for the failure to counter Taliban. Earlier in December 2017, a Pentagon report informed the Congress that it would take unilateral steps in areas of divergence with Pakistan. Meanwhile, media reports have claimed that the Trump Administration might withhold \$255million in aid to Pakistan. On December 22, 2017, Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary, Tehmina Janjua briefed the Senate’s Foreign Affairs Committee and stressed that Islamabad is in conversation with Washington on various “two-way” concerns. Meanwhile, Pakistan’s Military warned the US against “unilateral action”, saying there could be no compromise on national respect and sovereignty.

- On December 19, US State Department Spokesperson, Heather Nauert expressed US concerns about Jamaat-ul-Dawa, leader Hafiz Saeed running for office in Pakistan during the 2018 elections.

She said that the US offer of \$10 million for information leading to Hafiz Saeed’s arrest is still valid and referred to Saeed as the mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. The

comments by the State Department follow media reports that Saeed might contest the 2018 General Elections in Pakistan under the banner of the Milli Muslim League.

- On December 21, Pakistan's Foreign Office Spokesman, Dr. Mohammad Faisal said that the list of banned groups attached with the Amritsar Declaration of the Heart of Asia (HoA) Ministerial Conference in December, 2016 has been dropped from the Baku Declaration of the HoA conference held in in Baku on December 1, 2017.

He said that Pakistan has insisted that the selective listing should be avoided and all terrorist groups should be condemned without discrimination. He said the matter would now be referred to the Working Group on Counter Terrorism to come up with a comprehensive list of all terrorist groups in the Heart of Asia Region.

- During a six-nation first Speakers' Conference in Islamabad on December 24, Senate Chairman, Raza Rabbani warned of the emergence of a nexus between the US, Israel and India.

Speakers from Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey participated in the conference titled "the challenges of terrorism and inter-regional connectivity". Several issues including the occupation of Kashmir and the crises in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon were highlighted during the conference.

- On December 20, Pakistan's Foreign Office condemned the ballistic missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels on Saudi Arabia on December 19, 2017.

The Foreign Office also warned against the violation of the Kingdom's territorial integrity or threat to the holy mosques.

Pakistan

Internal

- On December 25, three soldiers of the Pakistan Army were killed along the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) when Indian troops resorted to unprovoked shelling.

The casualties came two days after India alleged that four Indian soldiers had been killed in Rajouri sector by Pakistani firing across the LoC.

- On December 19, Joint Resistance Leadership (JRL) comprising Syed Ali Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Muhammad Yasin Malik called for a shutdown in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) to protest against the killings of civilians, including two women by the Indian Occupied Forces.

The killings ignited strong protests in different parts of the region where hundreds of residents clashed with the Indian forces. According to media reports, soldiers fired live ammunition and pellets at protesters. In a separate development on December 31, 2017, four Indian soldiers and

three fighters were killed in clashes as rebels attacked the camp of India's Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in IOK.

- On December 17, at least nine members of the Christian community were killed and 56 injured after two terrorists attacked the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta. Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack.

All terrorists were killed during the attack. In recent years, Balochistan has seen increased violence against soft targets as well as the security forces. In October 2017, at least 18 people were killed when a suicide bomber targeted a shrine in Balochistan.

- During an in-camera session of the Senate Committee of the Whole House on December 19, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa briefed the country's lawmakers about the national security situation and the war on terror.

According to media reports, the lawmakers were told during the briefing that the military is observing the geopolitical situation of the region while stressing that Pakistan cannot ignore the situation in Afghanistan. The military leadership also emphasised better border management between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Bangladesh

- On December 28, former Prime Minister and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson, Khaleda Zia appeared before a Dhaka court in connection with the Zia Orphanage Trust and Zia Charitable Trust corruption cases.

In 2008, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed the case against six people, including Khaleda Zia and her eldest son Tarique Rahman, for allegedly misusing Tk2.1 crore from the funds of the Zia Orphanage Trust. In 2011, the corruption court accused the BNP chief and three others of misappropriating Tk3.15 crore from the Zia Charitable Trust Fund. Khaleda Zia's counsel described the cases as 'false' and 'politically motivated'.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

South Asia: (II)

Afghanistan

- On December 28, a bomb blast killed 41 people and left 80 others wounded in a Shia cultural centre in Kabul city.

The Afghan Interior Ministry said that the blast occurred at a compound containing a news agency, a Shia cultural centre and a religious school. The explosion struck an area close to the Afghan Voice news agency and Tebyan cultural centre. People gathered in Tebyan were marking the 38th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Women and children were among those killed. Shias have been targeted in Afghanistan throughout 2017. Earlier, on October 21, 2017 Daesh claimed responsibility for killing at least 39 people at a Shia mosque in Kabul. Daesh also claimed responsibility for this attack.

- On December 27, the second air cargo route was launched between Afghanistan and India.

At the launch ceremony in Kabul, the Deputy Chairman of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), Khan Jan Alokzay said, “Afghanistan’s fruit exports would increase further with the Kabul-Mumbai route. India is not charging taxes to Afghan traders. We are also trying to send fruit to India’s Amritsar city”.

- On December 26, the first trilateral China-Pakistan-Afghanistan ministerial level talks were held in Beijing.

Foreign Ministers of the three countries discussed ways to encourage economic and security cooperation. Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi said, “We have agreed to help Afghanistan in peace process and to improve relations between Kabul and Islamabad. Pakistan would take practical actions over the Afghan peace process. We called on Taliban to join the peace process and Pakistan has announced their support for peace talks between Taliban and Afghan government. China would also support the Afghan peace process”. Wang also said that his country and Pakistan would look at extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Afghan Foreign Minister, Salahuddin Rabbani said, “The Afghan government is committed to cooperating with China because the country respects the Afghan government. We would continue our efforts to fight terrorism. Fighting terrorism needs joint cooperation. We believe this would improve our relations with Pakistan to fight common threats”. Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif said, “Afghanistan and Pakistan are two ‘strong brothers’.

- On December 25, Afghanistan’s Chief of Army Staff, General Mohammad Sharif Yaftali rejected a recent figure issued by Zamir Kabulov, Russia’s special envoy to Afghanistan, about Daesh fighters in the country as being fake and baseless.

Yaftali told the Afghan lower house of parliament, “We confirm the presence of up to 2,000 Daesh fighters in Afghanistan. Mr. Kabulov is sick and it is his habit to utter big things”. Meanwhile, Afghan Minister of Interior Affairs, Wais Ahmad Barmak told the house that Daesh is not a trend which comes from Iraq or Syria. Findings show that Daesh is one of the forces which have been created by the intelligence services of the regional countries. On December 23, 2017, Kabulov said, “... According to our estimates, the number of Daesh militants exceeds 10,000 and continues to grow, particularly due to new fighters arriving from Syria and Iraq”.

- On December 21, US Vice President Mike Pence visited Afghanistan and met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

The two sides discussed the situation in the country. They also discussed changes to the US strategy in Afghanistan, progress against Taliban militants and terrorist groups and the country’s delicate political state of affairs. Ghani thanked the US Forces for their support to the fight against terrorism and reiterated that the new US strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia was a good opportunity for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan and region. Later on, Pence visited the military base in Bagram and told the US troops, “The United States of America would no longer be bound by arbitrary timetables in Afghanistan. As the President said, America’s enemies must never know our plans. They must never believe they can wait us out. Instead our decisions would be based on an objective assessment of conditions on the ground and I believe victory is closer than ever before”.

- *Pajhowk Afghan News* reported on December 22 that 14 Taliban militants were killed and 9 others injured in Afghan security forces operation in the Giyan district of southeastern Paktika province.
- On December 21, Afghan security forces captured a Taliban centre in the capital of Uruzgan province and killed at least 15 militants.
- On December 19, Afghan security forces killed 14 Taliban insurgents during an operation in Nad Ali district of Helmand province.

Omar Zwak, a spokesman for the provincial governor said, “The operation was to clear the insurgents and the forces have also seized weapons during the operation”. In a related development on December 21, 2017, at least 17 Taliban insurgents were killed in an Afghan air and ground Forces operation in Nad Ali district of Helmand province.

- On December 18, German Defence Minister, Ursula von der Leyen and Federal Armed Forces Commander, Wolf-Juergen Stahl visited Camp Marmal in Mazar-i-Sharif, Northern Afghanistan.

The German Defence Minister said that the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan in recent years had been too rapid and she called for a longer-term commitment. She added, “I have not forgotten how it was at the beginning when we got out of ISAF too quickly with too big

a reduction in troop numbers. There is still a lot to do but I am convinced that we are going in the right direction with our mission there. We would need to have a lot of stamina and Afghanistan would occupy us for a long time yet". The German parliament voted last week to extend by three months Germany's military support for the Afghanistan mission to allow a new government to consider a longer-term extension.

- On December 18, Afghanistan's CEO, Abdullah Abdullah stressed upon the need to improve bilateral relations with Pakistan on the principle of good neighbourliness.

Abdullah expressed his views during a meeting with Pakistani parliamentarians, civil society activists and media representatives in Kabul. Normalisation of ties, expansion of trade, building up mutual confidence and resolution of issues between the two countries were discussed at the meeting. The CEO said that relations between the two countries should be strengthened and bilateral issues resolved through dialogue and in line with the principles of good neighbourliness. He also reiterated that Afghanistan had always desired cordial relation with all neighbouring countries, including Pakistan.

- On December 18, the Trump Administration announced its first National Security Strategy (NSS) and stressed upon the US commitment for supporting the Afghan government and security forces in their fight against the Taliban, Al Qaeda, ISIS, and other terrorists.

The NSS document also highlighted the role of Pakistan and India in Afghanistan. The new strategy also promises to continue promoting anti-corruption reform in Afghanistan to increase the legitimacy of its government and reduce the appeal of violent extremist organisations.

- On December 18, the Pentagon said in a report that US Forces conducted more than 2,000 missions in Afghanistan during the past six months.

The report states, "These operations included 420 ground operations and 214 air strikes against ISIS-K (the Islamic State's branch in Afghanistan), resulting in more than 174 Daesh killed in action; 1,644 ground operations and 181 air strikes against the Taliban, resulting in 220 Taliban killed in action; 68 ground operations and 28 air strikes against members of the Haqqani Network, resulting in 34 Haqqanis killed in action; and 43 ground operations against other insurgent networks, resulting in 36 enemy killed in action". The report also termed India Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner and the largest contributor of development assistance in the region

- On December 25, at least four civilians and two National Directorate of Security (NDS) members were killed in a suicide attack close to an NDS office near Abdulhaq Square in Kabul.

A suicide bomber detonated his explosives close to an NDS office in Shash Darak area close to Abdulhaq Square. Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack.

India

Internal

- On December 18, India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won legislative assembly elections in the states of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh.

In Gujarat, the BJP got 99 seats against 80 for the Congress in a house of 182. The BJP lost 16 seats, while the Congress gained 19 from the 2012 count when Prime Minister, Narendra Modi was Chief Minister. In Himachal Pradesh, the BJP won 44 seats against 21 of Congress in a house of 68 seats. The BJP lost the Unjha Assembly Constituency in Mehsana district, which includes Modi's hometown Vadnagar, to Congress. Incidentally BJP's Chief Ministerial candidate in Himachal Pradesh, Prem Kumar Dhumal was also defeated.

External

- The *Times of India* reported on December 28 that Israel has allowed Indian petroleum companies to explore oil and gas in its waters.

The development came as a result of worsening Indo-Iran relations after Tehran refused to award its Frazad-B oil fields to Indian consortiums. The Managing Director of Indian state owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, N K Verma confirmed the development, saying the consortium would go through certain processes before deciding on drilling for oil or gas in the block. The permission to the Indian consortium comes ahead of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's three-day visit to India from January 14, 2018 and indicates the willingness of both governments to expand the horizon of bilateral ties from security and defence to energy security.

- On December 26, Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that the wife and mother of Kulbhushan Jadhav (Indian spy) were mistreated during their visit to Islamabad.

The meeting between Jadhav and his family members was arranged by Pakistan as a goodwill gesture. However, Indian Foreign Ministry criticised the meeting as an 'exercise that lacked any credibility'. The MEA claimed that the cultural and religious sensibilities of family members were disregarded. The statement added, "This included removal of mangalsutra, bangles and bindis as well as change in attire that was not warranted by security. Jadhav's wife's shoes were removed for some inexplicable reason and despite her repeated requests not returned to her after the meeting. We would caution against any mischievous intent in this regard". Pakistan's Foreign office reacted in a statement, "If Indian concerns were serious, the guests or the Indian Deputy High Commissioner should have raised them during the visit, with the media, which was readily available, but at a safe distance, as requested by India". On December 28, 2017 Indian Minister of External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj spoke at Rajya Sabha (upper house of the Indian Parliament) and called the meeting hostile and humiliating. She added, "Now they are spreading such lies, like we knew they would, like we suspected they would when they confiscated the shoes. This is an absurdity beyond measure".

- On December 25, Indian Army claimed that it crossed the Line of Control (LoC) and killed three Pakistani soldiers.

A senior Indian Army officer said, “The limited tit-for-tat operation was carried out to avenge the killing of four Indian soldiers by Pakistani border action team. A small team of Indian Army’s Ghatak commandos surreptitiously crossed the Line of Control in the Rawalakot-Rakhchakri sector of Pakistan occupied Kashmir to kill at least three Pakistani soldiers and injure a few others”. However, the Inter Services Public Relations of Pakistan rejected any Indian claims of crossing the LoC.

- On December 22, Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat said that peace talks with Pakistan can take place only when it stops supporting terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir.

His remarks came during a visit to western sector, close to the Pak-India border, where he also witnessed the ‘Hamesha Vijayee’ exercise conducted by the Southern Command in Thar Desert. Rawat said, “Pakistan should stop supporting terrorists, only then can we say that peace talks should take place. We also want relations should be better but given what kind of actions there are (from their side) and terrorism is spreading in Jammu and Kashmir, it does not appear that they really want peace”. Rawat’s comments came a day after Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Raveesh Kumar said that India would like good relations with Pakistan provided Islamabad takes action against terror groups.

- On December 19, India and United States held the first bilateral Counter Terrorism Designations Dialogue in New Delhi.

The joint statement said, “The establishment of this mechanism reflects shared US and Indian commitments to strengthen cooperation against terrorist threats. The US and Indian delegations exchanged information on procedures for pursuing designations against terrorist groups and individuals through domestic and international mechanisms”. They also discussed best practices for effective implementation of the designations. The United States will host the second US-India Counterterrorism Designations Dialogue in 2018.

- On December 18, the new US National Security Strategy (NSS) highlighted India’s role as a leading great power.

The new NSS said that it would deepen America’s strategic partnership with India and support its leadership role in Indian Ocean security and throughout the broader region. The 68-page document said the US would seek to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India. India-US defence relationship was mentioned in the context of Indo-Pacific region, whereas it gave a very prominent role to India in South and Central Asia. Indian Ministry of External Affairs welcomed the new NSS and said, “We appreciate the strategic importance given to India-US relationship in the new National Security Strategy released by the US. A close partnership between India and the US contributes to peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region as well as to the economic progress of the two countries”.

---Kashif Hussain

UNITED NATIONS

- On December 28, Jamie McGoldrick, the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, said that 68 civilians were killed in two separate airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition in one day on December 26, 2017.
- On December 19, Rupert Colville, Spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), indicated that 136 civilians including women and children have been killed and 87 injured in airstrikes conducted by Saudi-led coalition in Sana'a, Sa'ada, Al Hudaydah and Taz governmentates in the period from December 6 to 16, 2017.

According to McGoldrick, one airstrike on December 26, 2017, hit a crowded public market in the Taz governorate in Yemen's south-west, killing 54 civilians and injuring 32 more. The second airstrike conducted on a farm in the Hodeidah governorate reportedly killed 14 members of the same family. McGoldrick said, "I am deeply disturbed by the escalated and indiscriminate attacks being carried out by the Saudi-led coalition." He added, "I remind all parties to the conflict, including the Saudi-led coalition, of their obligations under international humanitarian law to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure." In a related development on December 19, 2017, Rupert Colville, Spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said that 136 civilians have been killed and 87 injured in airstrikes conducted by Saudi-led coalition in the period from December 6 to 16, 2017. Colville said, "We urge all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including their obligation to respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution." According to the findings provided by Colville, four civilians were killed and four injured on December 9, 2017, when coalition airstrikes hit the official Yemen TV channel, Qanat Al Yemen. On December 10, 2017, at least seven civilians were killed when airstrikes struck a hospital in Al Hudaydah. On December 13, 2017, coalition airstrikes struck a prison building and a prison yard at a military police compound in the Shaub district of Sana'a, killing at least 45 people and injuring 53. Owing to the coalition airstrikes, nine children and one woman were killed in coalition airstrikes in Marib governorate and another 14 children died when airstrikes hit a farmhouse in Al Hudaydah governorate.

- On December 26, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) concluded the main part of its 72nd session and approved a nearly \$5.4 billion programme budget for the Organisation for the biennium 2018-2019.

The budget covers various UN activities including political affairs, international justice and law, regional cooperation for development, human rights and humanitarian affairs, and public information. The approved amount is \$286 million or 5% below the budget for the current two-year period 2016-2017 and \$193 million below the proposal made by the Secretary-General in October 2017. According to Johannes Huisman, the Director of Programme Planning and

Budget, in the Office of the Controller, most of the cuts in the budget were under operating or “non-post” areas, such as information technology or travel. While approving the budget, the General Assembly also endorsed the proposal to move from a biennial planning and budgeting period to annual programme budget on a trial basis, as of 2020. In addition to the budget, the UNGA also adopted a number of key resolutions, including reforms in areas of peace and security, and of management.

- On December 21, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly voted to denounce the US’ unilateral decision of recognising Jerusalem as Israel’s capital as being null and void.
- On December 18, the US vetoed a UNSC draft resolution rejecting President Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, and his plans to move the US’ embassy in Israel to the city.

The non-binding resolution titled “Status of Jerusalem”, was approved at a UN General Assembly emergency meeting with 128 votes in favour and 9 against, while 35 countries abstained. Through the adoption of the resolution the UN member states expressed “deep regret” over recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem and stressed that the Holy City “is a final status issue to be resolved through negotiations in line with relevant UN resolutions.” The Resolution demanded, “all States comply with Security Council resolutions regarding the Holy City of Jerusalem, and not recognise any actions or measures contrary to those resolutions.” The UNGA also affirmed that “any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council.” In this regard, the resolution urged all States to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem, pursuant to Security Council Resolution 478 adopted in 1980. The Resolution was passed despite intimidation by US President Donald Trump, who had threatened on December 20, 2017, to eliminate financial aid to member states that would vote against his decision. Nikki Haley, the US Ambassador to the UN, had also warned that she would be “taking names” of those countries disrespecting and disagreeing with Trump’s decision and voting against it. However, only nine states including Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Togo and the US voted against the resolution. Following the adoption of the resolution, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said, “This decision reaffirms once again that the just Palestinian cause enjoys the support of international community, and no decisions made by any side could change the reality, that Jerusalem is an occupied territory under international law.” While condemning the vote, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked Trump for his stance on Jerusalem and said, “I do appreciate the fact that a growing number of countries refused to participate in this theatre of the absurd.” Similarly, Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the UN, called the vote “null and void,” declaring that “no vote in the United Nations will make

any difference” Pakistan told the UNGA that the US decision was a clear violation of international law, and contrary to the provision of the Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on this issue. Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan’s Ambassador to the UN, said, “We regret and reject this action and urge the US to rescind its decision.”

The UNGA’s emergency meeting was held in the wake of the UN Security Council’s failure to adopt a similar draft resolution owing to a negative vote by the US on December 18, 2017. However, the draft resolution had received 14 votes in favour, including many US’ allies. The text of the resolution, tabled by Egypt, reiterated the UN’s position on Jerusalem and would have affirmed “that any decisions and actions which purport to have altered, the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded in compliance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council.” The text would also have called on all States “to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem.” In response to US veto, Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian Ambassador to the UN, said, “It is paradoxical that while we were waiting for a peace plan from the US, the Administration instead decided to further obstruct peace and delay its realisation.”

- According to *Foreign Policy* on December 20, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, High Commissioner of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, indicated that he would not seek a second four-year term, citing concern that his voice would be silenced in an age when the US and other world powers are retreating from their historical commitment to human rights.

Zeid announced his plans in an email to his employees. He wrote, “Next year will be the last of my mandate. After reflection, I have decided not to seek a second four-year term. To do so, in the current geopolitical context, might involve bending a knee in supplication; muting a statement of advocacy; lessening the independence and integrity of my voice – which is your voice.” His term ends in the summer of 2018. According to reports, Zeid had been under pressure to tone down his criticism of US President Donald Trump, who he has previously described as “dangerous” and blamed for a “surge in discrimination. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had also urged Zeid to ease off his public criticism of the President Trump over fears it put US support for the UN at risk. Zeid’s decision has raised concerns not only about the ability of the UN to play a role as a champion of human rights but also presented a gloomy assessment of the state of human rights one year after Trump came to power.

- On December 20, Yanghee Lee, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, expressed disappointment at Myanmar’s decision to deny her access to the country.

Lee said, “I am puzzled and disappointed by this decision by the Myanmar Government,” She added, “This declaration of non-cooperation with my mandate can only be viewed as a strong indication that there must be something terribly awful happening in Rakhine, as well as in the rest of the country.” Lee was scheduled to visit Myanmar in January 2018 to assess human

rights in the country, particularly in western Rakhine state. A Special Rapporteur's mandate requires two visits to Myanmar annually, in order to report to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. Since taking up the mandate in June 2014, she has visited six times. While the Government had responded positively to past requests to visit, access to some areas had been consistently refused, with the authorities citing security concerns. On December 29, Lee also called for international pressure on China and Russia to try to get them to oppose human rights abuses in Myanmar. She said, "I'd like to ask the international community to continue to work with China and Russia to persuade them to stand on the side of human rights." According to Lee, China and Russia had failed to back some initiatives in the UN aimed at trying to halt the Myanmar military's crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim community in Rakhine province. In a related development on December 18, 2017, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, High Commissioner of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that Myanmar had clearly "planned" the violent attacks on its Rohingya minority, and warned the crackdown could possibly amount to "genocide". Zeid said, "For us, it was clear... that these operations were organised and planned." He added, "You couldn't exclude the possibility of acts of genocide... You cannot rule it out as having taken place or taking place."

--- Moiz Khan