

August 1 – August 15

AREA BRIEF

[www.ssii.com.pk](http://www.ssii.com.pk)



**STRATEGIC STUDIES  
INSTITUTE ISLAMABAD**

[info@ssii.com.pk](mailto:info@ssii.com.pk)

## CONTENTS

<b>Foreword (General Observations)</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Americas</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Arms Control and Disarmament</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>China and East Asia</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Europe</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Middle East &amp; West Asia</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>South Asia</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>United Nations</b> .....	<b>33</b>

## Area Briefs: 1-15 August 2017

### General Observations

#### *Pakistan*

- The new Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi selected his cabinet comprising 43 members and they were sworn in by the President on 4 August. Later on the Cabinet swelled to over 50 members but in-fighting amongst members meant that a fortnight later there were still some cabinet members without portfolios.
- Pakistan's Foreign Office, on 7 August, reiterated that Pakistan would not become party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted by UN General Assembly on 7 July 2017. All the nuclear weapons powers (de jure and de facto) have refused to be party to the Treaty.
- Pak-US relations continued on their downward spiral as the US sought to blame Pakistan for its failures in Afghanistan. The Trump Administration has sought a punitive approach towards Pakistan as President Trump claims the US is losing in Afghanistan. Senator John McCain, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee unveiled his strategy for Afghanistan threatening Pakistan with new sanctions and at the same time calling for a long-term Pak-US strategic partnership. The US confusion over Pakistan and Afghanistan continues as the US fails to come up with a viable Afghan policy.
- Terrorism continued to hit Pakistan with a bomb attack in Lahore on 7 August that killed one person and injured 30. On 9 August four army personnel were killed during an operation against a terrorist hideout in Upper Dir and on 12 August 15 people, including 8 soldiers, were killed when a suicide bomber targeted a military truck in Quetta. These terror attacks were spread across three provinces of the country.
- According to Indian media reports on 6 August, the BJP is seeking to alter the special status given to Indian Occupied Kashmir under the Indian Constitution by attempting to alter Article 35 A.

## *International*

- The Trump Administration's hardening position towards Iran, including imposing a new set of sanctions on the country, have led to a more aggressive arms policy from Iran. On 13 August, Iran's Parliament approved a massive increase in Iran's budget for its missile programme and the foreign operations against Daesh conducted by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Earlier, on 3 August, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi had stated that the new US sanctions were a violation of the July 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- Meanwhile India continues to expand its military and nuclear productive capacity. On 8 August, the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) awarded the Hindustan Construction Company (HCC) a \$120 million contract to construct a Fast Reactor Fuel Cycle Facility (FRFCR) at Kalpakkam in Chennai.
- According to Indian media reports, India has decided to place its ballistic missile defence system in two villages situated in the Alwar and Pali districts of Rajasthan Province – signaling that Pakistan is the target of its initial BMD capability.
- India's missile development is bringing in the private sector and on 3 August Kalyani Strategic Systems Ltd inaugurated the country's first-ever private missile subsystems manufacturing facility near Hyderabad in partnership with Rafael Advanced Defence Systems of Israel.
- The China-India border stand-off continued with India's diplomatic efforts to end a seven-week military standoff with China reaching a deadlock. China has demanded India withdraw its troops from the Doklam region.
- Donald Trump's presidency continues to be mired in conflict. After racist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, 14 August, killed a woman and injured many others, President Trump initially failed to condemn the White Supremacists and KKK demonstrators, one of whom drove his vehicle into the anti-racist protestors. This drew strong criticism from within the Republican Party as well as from civil rights groups and eventually compelled Trump to condemn racism and the white supremacists.
- Terrorism continued to strike Afghanistan. On 1 August 33 worshippers were killed when a suicide bomber targeted a mosque in Herat. This was followed by an attack targeting

the Shia Hazara community in Mirzawalang village in the province of Sar-i-Pul on 6 August. Fifty people, including and women died in the militant attack against this village. In both these terrorist attacks there was Daesh involvement. These incidents reflect the increasing Daesh presence in Afghanistan as well as a growing presence in Pakistan.

*--- Dr Shireen M Mazari*

*Director General*

## AMERICAS

### Domestic

- On August 14, US President Donald Trump spoke out against racist violence after the killing of a protester in Charlottesville, Virginia.

*“Racism is evil and those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs,” he said. According to Trump the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis and white supremacists were “repugnant” to everything Americans held dear. Trump was criticised for not specifically denouncing extremists in his initial comments on the violence. Thirty two year old Heather Heyer died and 19 others were hurt when a car rammed into people protesting against a far-right march.*

- On August 14, two more Chief Executives resigned from President Trump’s American Manufacturing Council following Charlottesville.

*Intel’s Brian Krzanich and Under Armour’s Kevin Plank both followed Merck’s Ken Frazier in leaving the Council. The mounting pressure finally prompted President Trump to denounce white supremacists groups. Trump was criticised for not specifically denouncing the far right and blaming both sides instead. Plank sent out a tweet on August 14, 2017 condemning racism. “We are saddened by Charlottesville. There is no place for racism or discrimination in this world. We choose love & unity.” Ten hours later Plank released another statement on Under Armour’s Twitter account announcing his resignation from the advisory body.*

- On August 13 James Alex Fields Jr. from Ohio was charged with murder in a fatal car attack on an Anti-White Nationalist March.

*Fields was protesting on August 12, 2017 with a group of self-proclaimed fascists. He killed a woman and injured numerous others by driving his car into a crowd of marchers in Charlottesville, Virginia. The twenty year old sped his vehicle into a crowd of people who had been protesting the assembly of white nationalists, white supremacists and fascists. Unite the Right represented an array of groups including the Alt-Right, the Traditionalist Worker Party, the League of the South, Identity Evropa, Vanguard America, the National Socialist Movement (NSM) and the Proud Boys. The far-right groups also enlisted the Warlocks, a motorcycle gang, for protection. Far-right activists including white supremacists and neo-Nazis from across the US had gathered to protest the planned removal of a Confederate Monument. In response, locals, anti-racist activists and anti-fascists held a counter-demonstration. Since the city council voted in April 2017 to remove a statue of Robert E Lee, the foremost Confederate Military Leader during the US Civil War, far-right activists have been protesting at Charlottesville. Following a similar rally in May 2017, anti-Semitic and racist tweets were directed against Mayor Mike Signer, after he published a post*

*condemning the event. The rally was the third of its kind in Charlottesville during the last four months. The far right has focused on the city, because of plans to remove the statue and a fund to invest millions of dollars into marginalised communities. According to observers an even bigger reason is that the city has “a young, black vice mayor who is unapologetic in his blackness and who’s been getting a lot of support.”*

- On August 5 a mosque in Minnesota was bombed while worshippers gathered inside for morning prayers.

*No one was injured in the attack at the Dar Al Farooq Islamic Centre in Bloomington. According to Police the imam’s office was damaged. The FBI launched an investigation into the attack, which took place at around 5am local time. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) urged Islamic centres and mosques across the country to step up security. The local chapter’s Civil Rights Director, Amir Malik said, “If a bias motive is proven, this attack would represent another in a long list of hate incidents targeting Islamic institutions nationwide in recent months.”*

- On August 2, President Donald Trump expressed support for legislation seeking to curb the level of legal immigration into the US.

*Trump proposed a skills-based immigration system instead. He backed the proposal from Republican Senators David Perdue and Tom Cotton in a speech at the White House. The plan could face trouble in Congress however, where both Democrats and Republicans have responded to the proposal with skepticism. The proposals will join the numerous measures that Congress is already considering, including health care, tax reform, a budget and raising the debt ceiling, making it unlikely that the plan will get approved any time soon. Top White House aides have been working with Perdue and Cotton on the bill. If passed, it would dramatically change the current immigration system, which allows a number of ways to bring family members to the US along with job-based visas.*

## **International**

- According to the *BBC* on August 15, US President Donald Trump has asked US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to review China’s practices regarding intellectual property.

*The move is incremental, but could eventually lead to the US imposing trade sanctions. Trump is trying to balance working with China on relations with North Korea, with his “America-first” trade views. Meanwhile Beijing has vowed not to “sit idle” if the probe leads to sanctions. Trump signed the order, which authorises Lighthizer to explore whether to undertake a deeper Section*

*301 investigation. Earlier on August 2 three top Democratic Senators urged President Donald Trump to stand up to China as he prepares to launch an inquiry into Beijing's intellectual property and trade practices. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer asked Trump to skip the investigation and go straight to trade action against China. "We should certainly go after them," said Schumer in a statement. Senators Ron Wyden of Oregon and Sherrod Brown of Ohio also urged Trump to rein in China. Tensions between Washington and Beijing have escalated in recent months as Trump has pressed China to cut steel production to ease global oversupply and rein in North Korea's missile programme.*

- On August 12, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged his US counterpart President Donald Trump to avoid rhetoric that could inflame tensions with North Korea.

*An escalating war of words between the US and North Korea has raised global alarm. Xi made the plea in a phone call hours after Trump escalated his warnings to North Korea, saying it would "truly regret" taking hostile action against the US. China's Foreign Ministry said Xi urged Trump to avoid "words and deeds" that would "exacerbate" the already tense situation, exercise restraint, and seek a political settlement.*

- According to *The Guardian* on August 11, a US warship sailed close to an artificial island created by China in the South China Sea.

*The USS John S McCain destroyer was part of a "freedom of navigation" operation. It sailed within six nautical miles of Mischief Reef, part of the disputed Spratly Islands. According to a US official a Chinese frigate sent radio warnings at least 10 times to the USS McCain. "They called and said please turn around, you are in our waters. We told them we are a US (ship) conducting routine operations in international waters." The official said the interactions were all "safe and professional", with the operation lasting about six hours. China's Foreign Ministry said, "The US destroyer's actions have violated Chinese and international laws, as well as severely harmed China's sovereignty and security. "China is very displeased with this and will bring up the issue with the US side."*

- On August 10 President Donald Trump thanked Russian President Vladimir Putin for ordering the US to reduce its diplomatic staff in Russia.

*The remarks follow President Vladimir Putin's July 30, 2017 order reducing US Embassy and Consulate staff by nearly two thirds. Trump said, "I'm very thankful that he let go of a large number of people because now we have a smaller payroll." And also, "There's no real reason for them to go back" and "we're going to save a lot of money," in response to Putin's move, different from the reactions of other Presidents in similar circumstances in the past. The statement is contrary to the one issued by the State Department which termed Moscow's order "a regrettable and uncalled-for act."*

- On August 8 President Donald Trump threatened to unleash “fire and fury” against North Korea if it endangered the United States.

*Tensions with North Korea have escalated into “the most serious foreign policy challenge yet” of the Trump Administration. Trump sought to deter North Korea from actions that would put Americans at risk. However he did not specify any red lines. Administration officials have said that a pre-emptive military strike, while a last resort, is among the options they have made available to the President.*

- On August 8, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urged Thai leaders for more action on North Korea.

*It was the highest-level visit to Thailand by a US official since a military coup in 2014 soured relations with the United States. Tillerson’s top priority has been urging Southeast Asian countries to do more to cut funding streams for North Korea. According to Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Susan Thornton the United States believes North Korean front companies are active in Thailand and is trying to encourage Thailand to shut them down. The companies are using Bangkok as a regional hub and change their names frequently.*

- According to Reuters on August 2, a travel ban for US passport holders travelling to North Korea will take effect on September 1, 2017.

*The US State Department has asked Americans in North Korea to leave before that date. Journalists and humanitarian workers may apply for exceptions to the ban. In July 2017 the US government said it would bar Americans from traveling to North Korea. The ban comes at a time of heightened tensions between the two countries. North Korea will become the only country to which Americans are banned from traveling.*

- According to Reuters on August 2, US President Donald Trump “grudgingly signed into law new sanctions against Russia.”

*Moscow said the move amounted to a full-scale trade war and an end to hopes for better ties with the Trump Administration. The Congress overwhelmingly approved the legislation passing a measure that conflicts with Trump’s desire to improve relations with Moscow. Trump signed the bill behind closed doors, without the fanfare that customarily accompanies his signing of executive orders. Criticising the measure, he said it was infringing on his powers to shape foreign policy, and that he could make “far better deals” with governments than Congress.*

## Canada

- On August 11, a Canadian diplomat in Cuba was treated for hearing loss following disclosures that a group of American diplomats in Havana suffered severe hearing loss allegedly caused by an advanced sonic device.

*According to Brianne Maxwell, Canadian Government Spokeswoman for Global Affairs, officials “are aware of unusual symptoms affecting Canadian and US diplomatic personnel and their families in Havana. The government is actively working including with US and Cuban authorities to ascertain the cause.” Ottawa helped broker talks between Cuba and the US that led to restored diplomatic relations. In the autumn of 2016 a number of US diplomats began suffering from unexplained hearing loss. Several of the diplomats were recent arrivals at the embassy, which reopened in 2015 as part of President Barack Obama’s re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba.*

- According to the *BBC* on August 9, the Canadian military is building a camp to house the growing number of refugees crossing the US border.

*Hundreds of Haitians have crossed the US border into Canada, fearing deportation by President Donald Trump. On August 2, 2017 Quebec opened Montreal’s Olympic Stadium to help process the influx. The camp would house up to 500 asylum seekers in Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, Quebec, near Plattsburgh, New York. More than 3,300 people crossed into Quebec between January 1, 2017 and June 30, 2017. The military-built camp would house hundreds of asylum seekers in heated tents fitted with flooring and electricity while they wait for their refugee applications to be processed.*

## Latin America

- On August 14, Venezuela’s President Nicolás Maduro ordered the country’s Armed Forces to hold exercises following US President Donald Trump comments about military intervention.

*Maduro said Venezuelans had to be prepared to defend the country against “the imperialist boot.” The “civic-military” exercises are due to take place on August 26-27, 2017. On August 11, 2017 President Trump said the US was looking at all options on Venezuela “including a possible military option.” Other Latin American countries and the Venezuelan opposition condemned the remarks. Venezuela faces a worsening political crisis and more than 120 people have been killed in anti-government protests since April 2017. Speaking to reporters in the Colombian city of Cartagena, US Vice President Mike Pence defended the President’s comments. He said President*

*Trump was showing “his resolve not to stand by and let a neighbour collapse into dictatorship.” Pence said the US would use its “full economic and diplomatic weight to help restore democracy in Venezuela.” Pence said the US would involve countries across the world to pressure the Venezuelan government to allow elections. When asked whether pressure would include oil sanctions, he said the US was looking at a “full range of economic sanctions.” Many analysts have questioned the timing of President Trump’s comments ahead of Pence’s regional visit. Earlier on August 9, the Trump Administration imposed sanctions on eight more Venezuelan officials, including Hugo Chavez’s brother to punish them for helping President Nicolas Maduro to create a new legislative super body. The US targeted individual politicians and security figures but stopped short of placing broader financial sanctions on its vital oil industry. The new measures announced by the Treasury Department will freeze their US assets, ban them from travel to the United States and prohibit Americans from doing business with them. On August 1, 2017 Washington slapped sanctions on Maduro himself following similar action against 13 Venezuelan figures on July 26, 2017.*

- At least four people were shot dead in the Mexican resort of Acapulco on August 13.

*The latest murders were due to fights between rival gangs. Public security officials said that between January and June 2017, 714 people had been murdered in Tijuana and 412 in Acapulco. Tijuana, on the Mexico-US border, has long had a reputation for being extremely violent as drug dealers and human traffickers ply their trade but Acapulco too has witnessed a rise in violence. Despite the high levels of violence, Acapulco tourism officials say the port is seeing “a major renaissance in its cruise ship arrivals” with 32 cruise ships expected to call during 2017.*

- According to the *Washington Post* on August 9, the US government expelled two Cuban diplomats in May 2017 after Americans working at the US Embassy in Havana suffered unexplained physical ailments.

*According to the US Department of State, some Americans began reporting symptoms at the end of 2016, and a few either were removed for medical treatment in the US or asked to leave. Spokeswoman Heather Nauert linked “incidents which have caused a variety of physical symptoms” to the decision to expel two Cubans, but she did not directly blame the Cuban government for harming the Americans. “We don’t have any definitive answers about the source or the cause,” of symptoms she said were not life threatening.*

---Amina Afzal

## ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On August 13, Iran's Parliament approved more than half a billion dollars to increase the country's budget for its ballistic missile programme and foreign operations by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in response to US sanctions.
- On August 3, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi said that new US sanctions were a violation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed with world powers in July 2015.

*Araghchi said, "We believe that the nuclear deal has been violated and we will react appropriately." The US Treasury imposed sanctions on six Iranian firms in July 2017 after Iran launched a rocket capable of putting a satellite into orbit. The US said that these sanctions had been imposed in response to Iran's continued development of a ballistic missile programme. The US President Donald Trump also signed a bill imposing new sanctions on Iran, Russia and North Korea on August 2, 2017. The sanctions in that bill also target Iran's missile programmes as well as human rights abuses. Ali Larijani, the speaker of Iran's Parliament, said that Iran's JCPOA supervisory body had assessed the new sanctions and decided that they contradict parts of the nuclear deal. "Iran has complained to the JCPOA Commission for the breach of the deal by America," he added. The JCPOA Commission is a joint commission set up by the six world powers, Iran and the EU to handle any complaints about the deal's implementation.*

*Moreover, Iranian lawmakers also voted overwhelmingly to increase the country's budget for its ballistic missile programme on August 13, 2017. A total of 240 parliamentarians out of 244 voted to approve the bill. Larijani said, "The Americans should know that this was our first action." The bill mandates the government to allocate an additional \$260 million for missile development and the same amount to the IRGC's foreign operations wing, the Quds Force. It also seeks to impose sanctions on the entire US Administration and all Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) personnel. Furthermore, Iran's newly re-elected President Hassan Rouhani also threatened to quit the July 2015 nuclear agreement within hours if the US continues to impose new sanctions on the country. Rouhani issued the warning in a televised speech to Iran's parliament on August 15, 2017. According to Iran's semi-official Mehr News Agency, Rouhani said, "Iran has remained and will remain committed to the deal, though any breach of promise by other parties will receive appropriate responses."*

- On August 10, an American think tank, Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), claimed that Pakistan has built a "hardened, secure, underground" complex in a remote mountainous region in the Balochistan province that could serve as a storage site for nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles.

*The Report, titled 'Potential Nuclear Weapons-Related Military Area in Balochistan, Pakistan,' is authored by David Albright, Sarah Burkhard, Allison Lach and Frank Pabian. The observations in the report are made by the Institute on the basis of satellite imagery. The report said that the purpose of the complex is not yet available. However, it can be said that it could*

*serve as a storage site for strategic reserves and hence a means of protecting a counterforce nuclear strike capability. Given the physical characteristics of the site, it is an ideal and probable storage site for parts of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, the report noted. The report also said that the complex has three distinct entrances and a separate support area and the entrances are large and can accommodate even the largest possible vehicles.*

- According to another report published by ISIS on August 9, North Korea is projected to have 25 to 50 nuclear weapons by the end of 2020.

*ISIS in its other report on North Korea's nuclear programme has claimed that the country could develop 25 to 50 nuclear weapons by the end of 2020. The report has also speculated that North Korea could have produced 13 to 30 nuclear weapons by the end of 2016. These speculations are made on the basis of North Korea's estimated production and use of plutonium and weapon-grade uranium.*

- On August 10, a suspected unexploded bomb was found at the site of the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan.

*A spokesman for Fukushima operator Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) said that the 85-centimetre long device was discovered by workers constructing a parking lot close to the facility's reactors. It was believed to be an unexploded bomb dropped by the US during World War-II. A Japanese military airport existed in the area around the Fukushima site during the war, and the area was a target of US bombing raids. TEPCO called police immediately upon finding the device and suspended the construction work at the site. However, there was no impact on ongoing decommissioning operations at the nuclear plant, which suffered meltdowns in March 2011 after a powerful earthquake hit the region.*

- On August 8, India's Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) awarded the Hindustan Construction Company (HCC) a contract worth \$120 million to construct a Fast Reactor Fuel Cycle Facility (FRFCR) at Kalpakkam in Chennai.

*Under the award, HCC would construct nuclear safety compliant structures for a fast breeder reactor fuel processing plant, with associated civil, electrical and mechanical works. The project is expected to be completed in 48 months. After the completion of the project, the FRFCF will serve as a fuel processing facility for fast breeder reactors (FBR), which produce more material for a nuclear fission reaction than they consume. In July 2017, India's Atomic Energy Minister Jitendra Singh, informed the Lok Sabha, that the 500 MWe prototype fast breeder reactor at Kalpakkam would become operational in late 2017. Construction work on the prototype fast breeder reactor was started in 2004. Once the project is completed, India will become the second country after Russia to have a commercially-run fast breeder reactor.*

- According to India's *Daily News and Analysis* on August 7, the country has decided to install its ballistic missile defence system in two villages situated in the Alwar and Pali districts of Rajasthan Province.

*India's forest department has approved the acquisition of 850 hectares of land in Khoa in Alwar district and 350 hectares in Roopnagar in Pali district for deployment of the ballistic missile defence system that would provide protection to the country's western and northern areas including New Delhi and Mumbai. According to A. K. Singh, Additional Principle Chief Conservator of Forest, the state government allotted the land to India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) following the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest's decision to approve the DRDO's land acquisition proposal in 2014. Moreover, the state government has also allotted 80 hectares of land to the DRDO in the small town of Pilani situated in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan for setting up the BrahMos cruise missile assembly line. India has been working on its ballistic missile defence system since 1999. The country's two-layered ballistic missile defence system consists of two interceptor weapon systems known as Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV) and Advanced Area Defence (AAD). PDV is designed to intercept missiles at exo-atmospheric altitudes of 50–150 kilometres and AAD is designed to intercept missiles at endo-atmospheric altitudes of 20-50 kilometres. India's ballistic missile defence system has not been tested so far in an integrated mode, using both low and high-altitude interceptor missiles.*

- On August 5, the UNSC imposed new sanctions on North Korea in response to the country's two intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests carried out by Pyongyang on July 3 and July 28, 2017.

*The resolution, drafted by the US, banned North Korea's export of coal, iron, iron ore, lead, lead ore and seafood. It also stopped countries from increasing the number of North Korean labourers working there and also joint ventures. The resolution has added nine individuals and four entities to the UN blacklist, including North Korea's primary foreign exchange bank. China and Russia did not use their veto powers to disapprove the resolution. The US negotiated with China for a month on the latest resolution, before expanding talks to the UNSC. In response, North Korea said in a statement, issued by its official Korea Central News Agency (KCNA), that the new UNSC sanctions were a "violent violation" of its sovereignty. The country said it would not stop itself from developing its nuclear arsenal and also warned it would not negotiate while being threatened by the US.*

- On August 3, India's private sector Kalyani Strategic Systems Ltd inaugurated the country's first-ever private missile subsystems manufacturing facility near Hyderabad in partnership with Rafael Advanced Defence Systems of Israel.

*Baba N. Kalyani, Chairman of Kalyani Strategic Systems Ltd, said that the new entity, called Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems, would undertake the development of Spike, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM), and related technologies including missile electronics, command, control and guidance, electro-optics, remote weapon systems and precision-guided munitions. The production of the missile is expected to begin soon. According to the Kalyani group, the joint venture between the two companies would also invest in high-end technology and advanced*

*manufacturing techniques to design state-of-the-art weapon systems for the Indian Armed Forces. The Kalyani Group will have 51% equity holding in the joint venture company, while Rafael would hold the remaining 49 %.*

- On August 3, the US Air Force successfully test-fired an unarmed intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) from California.

*According to the US Air Force, the 30th Space Wing launched the Minuteman 3 missile from Vandenberg Air Force Base. The test was conducted to assess the effectiveness, readiness, and accuracy of the weapon system. Minuteman missiles are regularly tested with launches from Vandenberg that send unarmed re-entry vehicles 6,800 kilometres across the Pacific to a target area at Kwajalein Atoll. It was US' fourth ICBM test in 2017 amid growing tensions with North Korea, which tested its own ICBM twice in July 2017. The flight data of North Korea's recent ICBM test, conducted on July 28, 2017, showed that a broad part of the US mainland including Los Angeles and Chicago is now in range of Pyongyang's missile. The US conducted previous tests of Minuteman3 ICBM in February, April and May 2017.*

- On August 2, US President Donald Trump signed legislation imposing sanctions on Iran, North Korea and Russia.

*The bill was earlier approved by the US Senate with a vote of 98-2 on July 27, 2017. Unlike other bill signings, Trump did not invite news media to record the event, instead he recorded his comments in two written statements, one meant for Congress and the other issued to reporters. In his statement to Congress, Trump said that the bill included a number of clearly unconstitutional provisions. The new law allows Congress to halt any effort by Trump to ease sanctions on Russia. In his statement to reporters, Trump said, "This bill remains seriously flawed particularly because it encroaches on the executive branch's authority to negotiate." The legislation was passed to punish Russia over interference in the 2016 US presidential election and the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea. The sanctions would affect a range of Russian industries and might further hurt the country's economy, which is already weakened by 2014 sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea. The legislation has upset the European Union (EU), which has said the new sanctions might affect its energy security as the legislation gives the Trump Administration the option of imposing sanctions on companies helping develop Russian export pipelines, such as the Nord Stream 2 pipeline carrying natural gas to Europe, in which German companies are involved. The bill also includes sanctions on Iran owing to its alleged support for terrorism and continued development of ballistic missiles and against North Korea for its continued missile tests.*

--- Moiz Khan

## CHINA & EAST ASIA

### China

- According to *BBC* on August 15, US President Donald Trump asked his country's top trade official to review China's practices regarding intellectual property.
- In a related development on August 15, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce said that Beijing will take action to defend its interests if the US damages trade ties.

*China's Commerce Ministry stressed that the government has tried to make it easier for foreign companies to do business in China and strengthen protection of intellectual property. President Trump has frequently accused China of undermining the US economy and insists that the theft of intellectual property by foreign countries has costs the US millions of jobs and billions of dollars every year. Meanwhile, China says it has always attached importance to protecting intellectual property rights by formulating laws and regulations and the two sides should resolve their concerns through dialogue.*

- On August 10, Chinese state-run newspaper, *Global Times* noted in an editorial titled "Reckless game over the Korean Peninsula runs risk of real war" that Beijing would "stay neutral" if North Korea strikes first in a conflict with the US.

*However, it noted, "If the US and South Korea carry out strikes and try to overthrow the North Korean regime and change the political pattern of the Korean peninsula, China will prevent them from doing so." President Donald Trump upped the ante toward North Korea after the country announced plans to fire missiles near the US territory of Guam. President Trump has warned North Korea that military solutions are now "locked and loaded" if the country acts "unwisely".*

*China has repeatedly warned both Washington and Pyongyang not to escalate tensions on the Korean Peninsula. In a phone call with US President Donald Trump on August 11, 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged "relevant parties to maintain restraint". Meanwhile, the US said the two leaders agreed that "North Korea must stop its provocative and escalatory behaviour."*

- During the 7th East Asia Summit (EAS) foreign ministers' meeting in Manila on August 6, China and ASEAN countries agreed to a framework for talks on a "Code of Conduct" (COC) in the South China Sea.

*The "Code of Conduct" would not be legally binding and calls for cooperation rather than confrontation in the South China Sea. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China and ASEAN countries have successfully adopted the framework of the COC in the South China Sea, announcing that they would initiate substantive consultations on the text of the COC at a proper time within a year. He also said that joint efforts by China and members of the ASEAN have greatly improved the situation in the South China Sea. In the joint communique, ASEAN Foreign Ministers took note of the improving situation in the South China Sea over the past year, saying it reflected the positive results of cooperation in the region.*

## North Korea

- Citing the North Korean state media, *CNN* reported on August 10 that the North Korean plan to fire four missiles near the US Pacific territory of Guam would be ready for Kim Jong Un's consideration in days.
- In a related development on August 10, President Donald Trump warned North Korea it should be "very, very nervous" if it does anything to the US.

*President Trump said the regime would be in trouble "like few nations have ever been" if they do not "get their act together". Meanwhile, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson said that preventive diplomacy was yielding results. However he warned North Korea that any provocative actions would prove 'catastrophic' for efforts at a peaceful resolution to the crisis. However, in a related development on August 15, 2017, the North Korean state media said that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has reviewed plans to fire missiles towards the US Pacific territory of Guam but will hold off. On the same day, South Korean President Moon Jae-in said there would be no military action without Seoul's consent and his government would prevent war by all means.*

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

## EUROPE

- On August 15, the UK outlined an “ambitious new customs arrangement” it wants to secure with the EU after Brexit.

*Ministers said the plans would mean the “freest and most frictionless possible trade” with the rest of Europe. This could include a “temporary customs union” after Brexit to prevent border problems as the UK leaves the EU.*

- According to Germany’s Federal Statistics Department on August 15, the country’s economic growth slowed in the second quarter of 2017 but remained robust.

*The country’s gross domestic product rose by 0.6% in the three months until June, slightly lower than analysts’ forecasts. Consumer and state spending plus company investment drove the growth. However, the strong domestic economy sucked in a higher rate of imports dampening overall growth.*

- On August 11, the Italian government confirmed a fall of more than 50% in the number of migrants from Libya reaching its coastline in July 2017 as a potential turning point made possible by tougher actions against smugglers operating in the Mediterranean.

*The number of migrants fell to 11,459 in July 2017 from 23,524 in June 2016 and 23,522 in July 2016. The fall in numbers is most likely the result of a more aggressive turnaround policy by the Libyan Navy and Coastguard, backed by improved boats and equipment funded by the EU and Italian-led training.*

- According to IOM on August 11, three times as many migrants arrived in Spain so far in 2017 compared to the same period in 2016.

*The 8,385 sea arrivals in Spain could overtake Greece, which has had 11,713 people. The shift can be attributed to the fact that migrants are finding the Spanish route safer. The IOM say 11,849 people have arrived in Spain so far in 2017 compared to 13,246 in all of 2016.*

- According to Reuters on August 10, the EU recorded the largest increase in slavery of any world region in 2017.

*Analysts have suggested that many of the 100,000 migrants who have arrived in Europe are vulnerable to exploitation. The risk of slave labour in farming, construction and other sectors rose across the region, with 20 of the EU’s 28 member states scoring worse than in 2016 in an annual global slavery index by British analytics company Verisk Maplecroft. Globally there are 21 million*

*people in forced labour, including children, in a business worth \$150 billion a year, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO).*

- According to *The Guardian* on August 10, anti tourism marches have spread across Europe.

*As Europe suffers from heat wave Lucifer, a wave of anti-tourism protests are taking place in some of Europe's most popular destinations. "Tourism-phobia" has become a feature of the European summer. Meanwhile the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has defended the sector, calling on local authorities to do more to manage growth in a sustainable manner.*

- According to the *NY Times* on August 9, the various crises facing the continent has forced European Leaders to curtail their summer holiday.

*Issues including Brexit, the influx of illegal migrants, repeated terrorist attacks, banking crises and populist uprisings, mean the leadership can no longer afford weeks of slow and steady recharging. Emmanuel Macron will take but a "few days of vacation in France." Macron's aide declined to specify exactly when or where the French President would go, but said he would remain "available at any time." Macron gave his cabinet ministers two weeks off along with instructions to remain within "striking distance of Paris in case of emergency." Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni of Italy has remains busy in August cabinet meetings and has held talks with Libyan envoys. Notwithstanding the pressures, however, many leaders including PM Theresa May of Britain and German Chancellor Angela Merkel refuse to let political and economic challenges get in the way of their rest and recreation.*

- On August 7 Germany said it is set to send asylum seekers back to Greece.

*Reception centres in Greece remain overcrowded and there is a huge backlog in processing claims. Germany had halted such returns under a 2011 ruling by its Constitutional Court. However it can send migrants back under the EU's Dublin Convention. According to the Convention an asylum claim should be processed in the country where a migrant first entered the EU. Greek Migration Minister Ioannis Mouzalas said Greece had agreed to take some asylum seekers back in a goodwill gesture, as there had been "pressure" from some EU countries to do so.*

- According to *BBC* on August 5, scientists have warned that extreme weather could kill up to 152,000 people annually in Europe by 2100 if nothing is done to curb the effects of climate change.

*The number is 50 times more deaths than reported now, the study in *The Lancet Planetary Health* journal said. Heat waves would cause 99% of all weather-related deaths, it added, with southern*

*Europe being worst affected. Experts said the findings were worrying but some warned the projections could be overestimated.*

- On August 5 youth in Catalonia and the Basque Country painted the slogan “tourists go home” on some buildings as foreigners arrived in Spain on holiday.

*According to a spokesperson for leftist Catalans behind the protests the contemporary form of mass tourism was impoverishing working-class people. Leftist Basques plan to stage an anti-tourism march on August 17, 2017 in San Sebastian, during a major festival. Semana Grande (Big Week) is a week-long celebration of Basque culture. Regional officials say the protests are isolated insisting that tourists are welcome. They deplore the acts of vandalism, and stress that tourism is a vital industry for Spain. A record 75.6 million tourists visited Spain in 2016 - and Catalonia hosted 18 million of them, making it the most popular region.*

- According to *BBC* on August 4, several European countries have issued health warnings after record-breaking weather conditions continue to affect swathes of the continent.

*Parts of Europe are experiencing their most extreme heat in more than a decade as temperatures hit 44C. Sweltering temperatures in Italy have sparked wildfires, and dozens of towns and cities are on the Health Ministry’s maximum heat alert. The heat wave has left some regions facing the threat of severe drought.*

- On August 2, the Italian parliament approved a plan to send naval boats to Libya in an effort to stop migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

*Two vessels would be deployed initially. The plan is aimed at helping the Libyan coastguard and targeting human smugglers. Italy is the main recipient of migrants making the dangerous crossing from Libya. Earlier Italy seized a German rescue ship on the island of Lampedusa. The crew on board the *Iuventa*, operated by German NGO *Jugend Rettet*, is being questioned on the orders of the Italian prosecutor. While the NGO said the check was “standard procedure”, police said the ship was seized due to evidence of “facilitating illegal immigration.”*

- *BBC* reported on August 2 that eleven out of Italy’s 20 regions would declare a state of emergency in order to help tackle the ongoing drought.

*The areas include Veneto in the north, Sicily in the south, and also the Lazio region around Rome, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Marche, Molise, Puglia, Calabria, Sardinia and the autonomous province of Trento. Agriculture Minister Maurizio Martina said the government was ready to respond swiftly by activating the national solidarity fund. Record temperatures and a long period without rain have created the drought. Earlier local authorities in Rome reached a deal to avert*

*drastic water rationing, while the Vatican has economised by shutting down its fountains. The agriculture sector has suffered losses of at least €2bn.*

*---Amina Afzal*

## MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

### Iraq

- During a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli in Baghdad on August 13, Iraqi Interior Minister, Qasim al-Araji said Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman had officially asked him to facilitate bilateral talks between Tehran and Riyadh.

*Araji said he had informed the Saudi side of Iran's opinion that the first step to ease tensions between Tehran and Riyadh would be ensuring that Iranian Hajj pilgrims are treated with respect, and allowed to visit the Jannat al-Baqi' cemetery in Medina. He also said that Saudi officials had agreed to the demands and gave assurances that Jannat al-Baqi' was open to Iranians. Araji stressed that Iraq believes in the need for friendly relations between Tehran and Riyadh, because they contribute to the promotion of security across the Middle East. Iran's Interior Minister said that respect for Iranian pilgrims was very important to Tehran, underlining that Iran had always sought to cement its relations with Saudi Arabia and had not ever preempted severing ties with the Kingdom. Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia plummeted in September 2015 following a stampede during Hajj rituals in Mina, near the holy city of Makkah. Ties between the two countries further deteriorated when Riyadh executed prominent Saudi Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in January 2016. Saudi Arabia unilaterally severed its diplomatic ties with Iran following protests in front of its diplomatic premises in the cities of Tehran and Mashhad against Nimr's execution.*

- On August 12, Hoshyar Zebari, adviser to Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani, said that Iraq's Kurds are sticking to a plan to hold an independence referendum on September 25, 2017, despite a US request to postpone it.

*During a phone call with Barzani on August 10, 2017, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson requested him to postpone the referendum. The US and other Western nations are worried that the vote could ignite a fresh conflict with Baghdad and turn into another regional flashpoint. Turkey, Iran and Syria, together with Iraq have large Kurdish populations and all oppose an independent Kurdistan. Following Tillerson's phone call, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) issued a statement on August 11, 2017, saying, "On the issue of the postponement of the referendum, the President (Barzani) stated that the people of the Kurdistan Region would expect guarantees and alternatives for their future." In June 2017, the US State Department said it was concerned that the referendum would distract from more urgent priorities such as the defeat of Daesh.*

## **Israel**

- During an August 10 meeting with a delegation of 33 US Republican Congressmen, Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu expressed interest in partitioning Iraq and establishing an independent Kurdish state in the country.

*According to sources, Netanyahu expressed his "positive attitude" toward a Kurdish state in the northern areas of Iraq, saying the Kurds are a "brave, pro-Western people who share our values." In 2014, Netanyahu publicly said during a speech that Israel should "support the Kurdish aspiration for independence." The latest Israeli support for an independent Kurdish region comes two months after Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani warned about bids to break up Iraq, saying the Arab country's partitioning serves the interests of Israel. During a June 21, 2017, meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, Larijani said, "The Zionist regime seeks Iraq's disintegration." Israel has a longstanding relationship with the Kurds, whom it regards as one of the few non-Arab allies in the region.*

## **Lebanon**

- Citing Hezbollah's *Al-Manar TV*, *Dawn* reported on August 14 that hundreds of Syrian rebels and civilians have started leaving the Lebanon-Syria border area following a truce deal.

*Buses carrying members of the Levant People's Brigades rebel group started moving from the Lebanese border town of Aarsal in the direction of the Syrian village of Fleeta. The evacuation started two weeks after more than 7,000 Syrians, many of them Al Qaeda-linked fighters and their families, left Aarsal following a Hezbollah offensive. The Levant People's Brigades, whose members did not take part in July 2017 battles, will be heading to the Syrian town of Ruhaiba. The town is located 50 kilometres northeast of Damascus. According to media reports, the evacuees would return to normal life following an amnesty by the state.*

## **Palestine**

- On August 7, Jordan's King Abdullah met Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank to discuss tensions at the Al Aqsa Mosque site in Jerusalem and other political developments.
- On August 7, Palestinian officials called on the Trump Administration to take a clear position regarding the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

*Speaking to journalists after the meeting, Palestinian Foreign Minister Reyad Al Maliki said, "We discussed all issues of mutual interest and we agreed to form a crisis committee that will continue contacts to evaluate what has happened, the lessons to be learned and the challenges we may face at Al Aqsa Mosque." According to Maliki, Abbas and Abdullah also discussed US-led efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and stated that Israel must "recognise the principle of a two-state solution and end provocative settlement activity that is designed to prevent the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state." King Abdullah's visit followed a surge in violence in Jerusalem as Israel decided to install metal detectors at entrances to the Al Aqsa Mosque compound. The security measures led to days of protests and clashes between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli security forces until Israel decided to remove the metal detectors and other measures following consultations with Jordan. Jordan has been the custodian of Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites since the 1920s. The compound is also revered by Jews. Jordan has often played a mediating role in the region. A large percentage of the Jordanian population comprises Palestinians, and the country also shares a border with the West Bank.*

## **Qatar**

- On August 7, Qatar and Turkey held joint military exercises.

*According to Qatari media, the exercises were aimed at preparing Qatar's Armed Forces to defend vital economic, strategic and infrastructure facilities. The two countries are showcasing their strategic alliance following a boycott by Arab neighbours who accuse Doha of supporting terrorism. On June 7, 2017, the Turkish Parliament approved legislation to allow hundreds of troops to be deployed to a military base in Qatar, in a show of support for the country. Qatar also has the biggest US airbase in the region. Ankara said it would deploy 3,000 ground troops at the base to serve as a venue for joint training exercises and to support anti-terrorism efforts.*

## **Saudi Arabia**

- *Press Tv* reported on August 15 that recently leaked emails show that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is seeking an exit from the war in Yemen.

*According to the Middle East Eye news portal, Prince Mohammad raised the issue during a meeting with former US National Security Adviser, Stephen Hadley, and Martin Indyk, a former US Ambassador to Israel. The details of the meeting were revealed in an email exchange between Indyk and Emirati Ambassador to Washington Yousef al-Otaiba in April 2017, which was obtained by the GlobalLeaks campaign group. Otaiba wrote to Indyk that he thought Prince Salman "is far more pragmatic than what we hear is (sic) Saudi public positions." Indyk replied, "I agree on that. He was quite clear with Steve Hadley and me that he wants out of Yemen,"*

*adding that the Saudi prince “is OK with the US engaging Iran as long as it is coordinated in advance and the objectives are clear.”*

- *Al Jazeera* reported on August 1 that hundreds of people have fled a town in Qatif governorate in eastern Saudi Arabia, where government forces are fighting Shia Muslim gunmen and activists.

*Fighting has intensified in recent days in Awamiya where authorities have been trying to tear down the old quarter to prevent fighters using the narrow streets to hide. According to local activists, Saudi forces have facilitated the departure of people fleeing the clashes. At least seven people including two police officers have been killed. Dozens of families have been given temporary accommodation in a nearby town. Local activists have accused Security Forces of driving hundreds of residents out of Awamiya by firing randomly at homes and cars as they confront armed men in the area. The UN has urged the Kingdom to take human rights and international regulations into consideration before taking any action.*

## **Syria**

- On August 13, Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu announced that Syria has increased the size of the government-held areas across the country by two and half times in just two months, calling the achievement a “great success.”

*Shoigu also predicted the end of the conflict with Daesh. He said the fall of the militant stronghold of Dayr al-Zawr, “will say a lot, if not everything, about the end of the battle with Daesh.” The Syrian forces now control almost half of the city of Dayr al-Zawr and a nearby military airport. Daesh is in control of the other half of the provincial capital. The city has been under siege since 2014, with food and ammunition only being delivered by air to the government-held parts. Shoigu’s comments came amid concerted attempts by government troops, backed by airstrikes, to fully retake the city from terrorists.*

- According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, on August 12, a commando operation backed by Russian war planes and helicopters killed 25 members of Daesh in central Syria.

*The Syrian Army, with the support of Russia, has waged an offensive to recapture the region that stretches from the country’s centre to the Iraqi and Jordanian borders. According to a military source, the operation occurred ‘20 kilometres inside Daesh terrorist lines’. The raid allowed regime forces to seize control of three villages in the area. According to the Observatory, Daesh now controls just a few villages in the east of Homs.*

- According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on August 8, at least 29 civilians, including 14 children, were killed in US-led airstrikes on Raqqa.

*Concerns are mounting over the civilian cost of the US-led coalition's campaign to reclaim Raqqa, with reports of airstrikes killing and wounding hundreds of Syrians. According to observers, the reports raise questions about the US commitment to protect civilians in the battle amid a reported loosening of the rules of engagement under President Donald Trump. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance of coalition-backed groups, began its assault on Raqqa in June 2017 after a long campaign to isolate the city.*

- During an August 7 meeting with a parliamentary delegation comprising members of a number of Tunisian parties, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said foreign powers have desperately attempted to divide Arab nations by targeting their identity and igniting strife between them.

*President Assad met with the Tunisian delegation in Damascus. Members of the delegation said they had come to Damascus to convey a message of support for the Syrian government and people, who have long resisted foreign-backed terrorist groups. President Assad said, "The external interventions will continue with the aim of changing our identity and dividing us into communities and small groups." He stressed the need for further cooperation between the two countries. According to Assad, such parliamentary delegations could be helpful in exchanging expertise and creating a state of dialogue not only about the current situation, but also about the future.*

## **Turkey**

- During an August 10 interview with Turkish daily *Turkiye*, Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu warned that the US partnership with Kurdish militants in Syria's northern province of Raqqa would pave the way for other terror organisations in the region to strengthen their positions.

*Minister Cavusoglu said, "Even if just for tactical reasons, the use of a terrorist organisation, the YPG (People's Protection Units) in the Raqqa operation will lead to other terror organisations in the region gaining more ground. The aim of the YPG is to make its territorial gains lasting through demographic engineering under the cover of the fight against the Daesh." Ankara views the YPG as a terror organisation linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which has long been fighting for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Turkey has been at odds with the US in Syria, with Ankara criticising Washington over its support for YPG forces in the operation in Raqqa.*

- Following a meeting with his Chinese counterpart on August 3 in Beijing, Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu said Turkey regards China's security being akin to its own and would remove any anti-China reports in its media.

*Cavusoglu said, "We absolutely will not allow in Turkey any activities targeting or opposing China. Additionally, we will take measures to eliminate any media reports targeting China." China and Turkey have agreed to step up cooperation on security and counterterrorism, amid Beijing's concerns about ethnic Uighurs from its restive region of Xinjiang fighting militants in the Middle East. The Uighurs are a largely Muslim, Turkic-language speaking minority from China's Western Xinjiang region. Many, keen to escape unrest in Xinjiang, have travelled clandestinely via Southeast Asia to Turkey, with which many see themselves as sharing religious and cultural ties. Beijing says some Uighurs then end up fighting militants in Iraq and Syria. China maintains that it does not restrict the Uighurs' religious freedom.*

- On August 2, Turkey's Supreme Military Council (YAS) replaced the land, air and naval commanders of the military.
- On August 1, Turkey put nearly 500 people on trial on charges of leading the July 2016 failed coup.

*The trial is part of a postcoup crackdown that has imprisoned 50,000 people and fired another 110,000 from government jobs. Many of the suspects face life in prison for crimes including murder and attempting to overthrow the government. US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, the main defendant in the case, is being tried in absentia. The Turkish government blames him for the coup attempt. Gulen, however, has denied involvement. The other defendants include generals and fighter jet pilots at the Alcinci air base, who have been accused of directing the coup and bombing key government buildings, including the parliament.*

## **Yemen**

- Citing regional and Western sources, *Reuters* reported on August 1 that Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has started using a new route across the Gulf to supply covert arms shipments to its Houthi allies in Yemen's civil war.

*According to Reuters, in March 2017, Iran was shipping weapons to the Houthis either directly to Yemen or through Somalia. This route, however, risked contact with international naval vessels on patrol in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. For the last six months, the IRGC has been using Gulf waters between Kuwait and Iran as it looks for new ways to beat an embargo on arms shipments to Houthis. Through this new route, Iranian ships transfer equipment to smaller vessels at the top of the Gulf, where they face less scrutiny. According to sources, the transshipments take place in Kuwaiti waters and in nearby international shipping lanes. According to a senior Iranian official, 'Parts of missiles, launchers and drugs are smuggled into Yemen via Kuwaiti waters.'*

---Muhammad Shoaib

## SOUTH ASIA

### Pakistan

#### External

- On August 14, Chinese vice Premier, Wang Yang visited Islamabad and met Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi.

*Following the meeting, the two sides signed letters of Exchange for FATA Schools Project. The two countries also signed a strategic cooperation agreement. According to the Foreign Office, Vice Premier Wang Yang visited Pakistan on the direction of President Xi Jinping as a special gesture to participate in 70th Independence Anniversary celebrations of Pakistan.*

- Citing a Foreign Office official on August 12, *Dawn* reported that the disclosure made by former President General (retired) Pervez Musharraf in his 2006 autobiography that Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan transferred sensitive nuclear material to North Korea was a big embarrassment for the country.

*The statement came during a meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The official said that the response was viewed internationally with scepticism and disbelief. In 2004, US intelligence reports suggested that an underground network of suppliers of nuclear technology led by Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, shared equipment with Iran, North Korea and Libya. The Pakistani government denied it authorised any transfers of weapons technology, but said, individuals may have done so for their own profit. In February, 2004, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan admitted to his role in leaking nuclear weapons secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea. However, President Pervez Musharraf pardoned Khan for his involvement in nuclear proliferation.*

- On August 9, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa met Saudi Deputy Defence Minister, Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al-Aysh in Rawalpindi and discussed matters of bilateral interest including the border regional security situation.

*Following the meeting, General Bajwa reiterated Pakistan's commitment to the defence of Harmain Sharifain and safeguarding the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia.*

- On August 8, Pakistan's Foreign Office summoned Indian Deputy High Commissioner J.P. Singh to lodge a protest against Indian ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC).

*According to Pakistan Army on August 7, 2017 a woman was killed after Indian troops shelled the civilian population in Nakyal and Khulratta sectors of Azad Jammu and Kashmir "without any provocation." The Foreign Office said that India should allow the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) to play its role according to the resolutions of the UNSC. India does not recognise the UNMOGIP's role in supervising the LoC and thus refuses to lodge any complaints of ceasefire violations with the UNMOGIP since 1972 when the two*

*countries concluded the Simla Agreement. Pakistan, however maintains that the UNMOGIP can only become irrelevant with reference to the Security Council and not without its consent. Pakistan also continues to lodge complaints of ceasefire violations with the UNMOGIP.*

- According to *Radio Pakistan* on August 8, Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said that any talks with India or Afghanistan would be held on the basis of parity.

*Prime Minister Abbasi also said that he supports dialogue with New Delhi and Kabul without compromising Pakistan's interests. Pakistan's renewed offer for dialogue with India and Afghanistan comes soon after the change of leadership within the ruling PML-N. Meanwhile, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani also telephoned Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on August 8, 2017, after which the two sides reiterated their willingness to work together to combat terrorism.*

- On August 7, Pakistan's Foreign Office said that Pakistan, like all the other nuclear armed states, cannot become a party to The Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty), adopted by a vote on 7 July 2017 in New York.

*The Foreign Office emphasised, "This Treaty neither forms a part of, nor contributes to the development of customary international law in any manner". The Foreign Office remarked that negotiations should be consensus based taking all relevant stakeholders on board. The Foreign Office, however, reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to disarmament citing the Conference on Disarmament as the most ideal forum for concluding such an agreement. Pakistan, along with other nuclear weapon states, boycotted negotiations on the said Treaty in the UN General Assembly, making prospects for its success minimal. After the Treaty was adopted, the US, Britain and France said in a joint statement, "We do not intend to sign, ratify or ever become party to it." The Treaty prohibits a full range of nuclear-weapon-related activities, such as undertaking to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as well as the use or threat of use of these weapons.*

- According to *Dawn* on August 5, US National Security Adviser, General H R McMaster said that President Donald Trump wants Pakistan to change its 'paradoxical' policy of supporting the militants who are causing the country great losses.

*General McMaster also defended President Donald Trump's military strategy in Afghanistan, after the President said the US is "losing" in the country. He said that the President wants "to see a change in behaviour of those in the region," who are, "supporting the Taliban, Haqqani Network and others." In recent years, the fighting between the Taliban and government forces has intensified. The Trump Administration is finding it difficult to agree on a strategy to counter the worsening Afghan crisis. However, it is considering a tougher line towards Pakistan for its inaction against the Haqqani network. Analysts say the distrust between the US and Pakistan will deepen more as the former continues to blame the latter for the situation in Afghanistan. Meanwhile on August 10, 2017, Senator John McCain, the Chairman of the Senate Armed*

*Services Committee, unveiled his own strategy for the US in Afghanistan. McCain's Afghan Strategy includes adding more US troops for counterterrorism missions and increasing US airpower to aid Afghan forces. McCain's Afghan strategy threatens Pakistan with new sanctions, but at the same time calls for a long-term US-Pakistan strategic partnership that could result from Pakistan's cessation of support for all terrorist and insurgent groups.*

- On August 3, Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesman, Nafees Zakaria said that Pakistan wants a sustained, meaningful and result oriented dialogue with India that addresses all issues particularly Jammu and Kashmir.

*He also warned, "Peace in the region is not possible without resolving the Kashmir dispute." On Afghanistan Zakaria said that there are parts of "ungoverned territories" in the country and that Daesh militant group and other terrorist outfits are gaining ground as a result. According to US military estimates the Afghan government controls only 57 % of the country.*

- On August 1, Indian and Pakistani officials met in Washington under the auspices of World Bank to discuss technical issues related to the Indus Water Treaty (IWT).

*The World Bank said, "The meetings were held in a spirit of goodwill and cooperation." Pakistan has objections over the construction of the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric power plants being built by India in occupied Kashmir. India iterates that the development is not in conflict with the Indus Water Treaty whereas Islamabad argues that the technical design features of the two plants breach the Indus Waters Treaty.*

## **Pakistan Internal**

- On August 9, four personnel of the Pakistan Army, including a major, were killed during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) against a terrorist hideout in Upper Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

*Following the raid, Pakistan Army said that one terrorist was captured alive while two others had been killed. In a separate development on August 12, at least 15 people, including eight soldiers, were killed after a suicide bomber targeted a military truck in Quetta.*

- On August 7, at least 1 person was killed and 30 others injured after a bomb attack in Lahore.

*No one claimed responsibility for the attack. According to preliminary reports explosive material was planted inside a truck. Earlier on July 24, 2017, a suicide attack by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) killed at least 25 people in Lahore, many of them policemen.*

- During a meeting of Corps Commanders at the General Headquarters (GHQ) on August 7, Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa said, “The army was committed to national defence and security.”

*He also called for continued efforts to “defeat terrorism in order to establish rule of law and uphold supremacy of Constitution.” The Corps meeting also discussed the prevailing situation in Afghanistan in which the military called for “trust based mutual cooperation” between the two countries. The Military also reiterated its commitment to regional peace and security.*

- On August 4, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi’s 43-member cabinet was sworn-in by President Mamnoon Hussain in Islamabad.

*The development follows the election of the new Prime Minister after the Supreme Court of Pakistan disqualified his predecessor, Nawaz Sharif under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution.*

- *The Times of India* reported on August 6 that a section of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sympathisers is pushing the party’s less-noticed promise of altering Article 35A of the Indian Constitution.

*Article 35A empowers the government of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) to provide special rights and privileges to the permanent residents of the state and restrict non-residents from purchasing land in the state. However, the ruling BJP has been attempting to erode the special status of IOK, as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. IOK Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti has warned New Delhi against tampering with article 35A. Meanwhile, on August 10, 2017, Pakistan’s Foreign Office alleged that India was trying to convert the Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) region into a Muslim minority region.*

## **India**

- During an Independence Day speech on August 15, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that India can defend itself from anyone who seeks “to act against our country”.

*Narendra Modi also said, “When the surgical strike was carried out, the world came to know about the power that India possesses.” Earlier on September 29, 2016, the Indian military claimed it had conducted “surgical strikes” against “terrorist launch pads” in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK). Pakistan rejected Indian claims as an “illusion”.*

- Citing the Deputy Interior Minister, Kiren Rijju, *Reuters* reported on August 14, that Rohingya Muslims living in India were illegal immigrants and the government is looking to deport an estimated 40,000 Rohingya Muslims back to Myanmar, including those registered with the UN Refugee Agency.

*The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has issued identity cards to about 16,500 Rohingya in India that it says helps them “prevent harassment, arbitrary arrests,*

*detention and deportation". However, India insists that the UNHCR registration remains irrelevant.*

- According to *Reuters* on August 8, India's diplomatic efforts to end a seven-week military standoff with China have reached a deadlock.

*China insists that India unilaterally withdraw its troops from the Doklam region claimed by both Beijing and Indian ally Bhutan. The Chinese state-run media has recently ratcheted up rhetoric on the ongoing military standoff between India and China at Doklam. According to an article in Chinese state-controlled newspaper, Global Times, China is preparing for "small-scale military operation to expel Indian troops within two weeks," in the disputed Doklam area. Earlier, in June 2016, the Indian military obstructed Chinese efforts to construct a road in the Doklam area near the Sikkim region that is situated at a junction between China, the Indian state of Sikkim and Bhutan. New Delhi says the road, if built, would have security implications for India. Earlier on August 3, 2017, the Chinese Foreign Ministry warned India over military build-up in Doklam region saying, "This is certainly not for peace."*

## **Afghanistan**

- On August 6, at least 50 civilians, including women and children were killed in a militant attack in Mirzawalang village in Afghanistan's province of Sar-i-Pul.

*Zabihullah Amani, a spokesman for the provincial governor said that most of the victims were members of the Shi'ite Hazara community. Seven members of the Afghan Security Forces were also killed while the militants took dozens of civilians' hostage. Amani said that the attack was a joint operation by the Taliban and Daesh fighters. However, the Taliban denied it was a joint operation and said their fighters had killed 28 members of a government-supported militia in the area.*

- On August 1, at least 33 worshippers were killed after a suicide attacker opened fire and then detonated explosives during prayers at a mosque in the Afghan city of Herat.

*Daesh militant group said it was behind the attack. The attack came a day after Daesh claimed an attack on the Iraqi embassy in Kabul. The assault was the latest in a series of attacks on Afghanistan's Shia population. Earlier in June 2017, an attack at a Shia mosque in Kabul killed at least four people. The Pentagon is planning to send additional US troops to Afghanistan as the Afghan government struggles to counter the growing militant attacks in the country. In a separate development on August 5, 2017, Afghan warlord and former Prime Minister, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar rejected any increase in the US troops in Afghanistan. He suggested that only elections could bring stability to the country.*

--- Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

## UNITED NATIONS

- On August 14, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said that more than 500,000 people in Yemen are suspected of having cholera and warned that the disease was spreading quickly due to a lack of clean water or health access.

*WHO said, “Yemen’s cholera epidemic, currently the largest in the world, has spread rapidly due to deteriorating hygiene and sanitation conditions and disruptions to the water supply across the country.” The organisation noted that nearly 2,000 people have died since the outbreak began at the end of April 2017. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said, “Thousands of people are sick, but there are not enough hospitals, not enough medicines, not enough clean water.” He said that many of doctors and nurses who are working in very insecure regions had not been paid for nearly a year. They must be paid their wages so that they can continue to save lives.*

- On August 11, the United Nations warned aid workers in western Myanmar of rising hostility from the troubled Rakhine state’s majority Buddhists.

*According to Reuters, the text of a “precautionary security notification” was distributed to the 300 UN staff and to international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in Rakhine. The Office of the UN’s Resident Coordinator in Myanmar confirmed it had issued the notification as part of routine safety and security practice. The notification said that some Buddhists feel that humanitarian agencies are giving support to Rohingya Muslim militants. It also said that the perception and rumour that UN Agencies were supporting Muslim militants, and even their support to the broader Muslim community, has fuelled anti-UN and INGO sentiment and hostility towards them. About 1.1 million Rohingya Muslims live in Rakhine and are facing restrictions on their movements and access to basic services. These Muslims heavily rely on aid agencies for basic provisions.*

- On August 8, David Shearer, the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative and the head of UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), said that phased deployment of the UN-Authorised Regional Protection Force has begun in South Sudan.

*Shearer said, “Having additional troops mean we can carry out more tasks related to our mandate, to protect civilians and build durable peace.” According to the UNMISS, the deployed force would provide protection to key facilities in Juba, and the main routes into and out of the city. It would also strengthen the security of UN civilian protection sites and other UN premises. UN Security Council Resolution authorised the deployment of the 4,000-strong Regional Protection Force in 2016. Shearer said the deployment of new forces would allow the existing UNMISS troops based in Juba, to be reassigned to different locations across South Sudan to protect civilians, support humanitarian assistance, and monitor and report on human rights abuses.*

- On August 7, Jamie McGoldrick, the Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, expressed deep concern about reports of airstrikes on civilians in Yemen's Sa'ada Governorate and urged all parties to the conflict to uphold their responsibility under international humanitarian law to protect civilians.

*McGoldrick said, "All parties to the conflict continue to show a disregard for the protection of civilians and the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants in the conduct of hostilities." He was referring to the attacks on a house in As-Safra District and on a private vehicle in Razih District on August 4, 2017, that resulted in the deaths of at least 12 civilians, including women and children and injured more than ten people. McGoldrick said these incidents were examples of the brutality with which the conflict was being conducted. He also noted that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was still investigating these new incidents. The UN has also condemned a delay in the delivery of fuel needed for its humanitarian operations in the country. The UN operates two humanitarian flights into Yemen's capital Sanaa from Amman and Djibouti. However, the planes could not conduct their operations owing to the non-availability of fuel in Sanaa. According to UN officials, the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen was obstructing deliveries of jet fuel to Sanaa. Auke Lootsma, the Country Director of the UN Development Programme, said, "We have difficulties in obtaining permission from the coalition and from the government of Yemen to transport this jet fuel to Sanaa to facilitate these flights."*

- On August 4, Stéphane Dujarric, UN Spokesman, said that United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres received a notification from the Delegation of the US expressing the country's intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change as soon as it is eligible to do so.

*Dujarric said that the US decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement was a major disappointment for global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote global security. Under Article 28 of the Paris Agreement, a Party may withdraw at any time after three years from the date on which the agreement has entered into force for that Party, and such withdrawal takes effect upon expiry of one year from the date of receipt by the Depositary of the notification of withdrawal. The US accepted the Paris Agreement on September 3, 2016, and the Agreement entered into force for the country on November 4, 2016. The US must stay in the pact until 2019. The notification from the US said the country intends to exercise its right to withdraw from the Treaty, unless it identifies suitable terms for re-engagement. Dujarric said that the Secretary General would welcome any effort to re-engage the US.*

--- Moiz Khan