

July 16 – July 31

AREA BRIEF

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## Area Briefs: 16-31 July 2017

### General Observations

#### *Pakistan*

- The Pakistan-US relationship continued on a downward spiral with the US Congress withholding \$50 million in military reimbursements to Pakistan for fiscal year 2016 after US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis claimed that Pakistan had not done enough against the Haqqani network. This is the second time the US has reneged on its payments that are not aid but money for services rendered. In 2016 the Pentagon held back \$300 million in reimbursements. As the US's Afghan policy sees continuing failure, the US Administration is using Pakistan as its whipping boy to rationalise the Afghan failures domestically. On 24 July the Pakistani COAS General Bajwa met with the commander of US forces in Afghanistan General Nicholson and took up the issue of the "blame game" being played out by segments of the ruling elite in Afghanistan and the US Administration simply to undermine Pakistan's efforts in the war on terror.
- In a related move, at a conference at the Aspen Institute in California during last week of July, the Afghan envoy to the US, Hamdullah Mohib, called on the international community to stop supporting Pakistan. His call was countered by ambassador Robin Raphael.
- Indian attacks along the LoC also continued to escalate. On 16 July, Indian forces attacked a Pakistan military vehicle in the Athmuqam sector in AJK killing 4 soldiers. The following day Pakistan informed India through the DGMO hotline that it would block Indian supply lines near the LoC and warned that continuing violations along the LoC could escalate into a wider military standoff. India is taking advantage of a near-paralysis within the civilian government as a result of the Panama case.
- On 28 July 2017, PM Nawaz Sharif was disqualified by the SC under Article 62:1f of the Constitution and the National Accountability Bureau was asked to file references against him his children his son-in-law and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar in the Accountability Court.
- Terror struck the heart of Lahore on 24 July when a suicide attack killed 26 people near Ferozpur road. The TTP took responsibility for the attack which came just hours after the Afghan Taliban attacked a government employees bus in Kabul, killing 35 people.

## *International*

- The US again, On 27 July, reiterated its support for India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) and asked other NSG members to support India's application. The US Depts of Defence and State stressed this support in a joint report presented to the US Congress. The US also re-stated its support for India joining two other Supplier Cartels – the Australia Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement.
- Meanwhile India has continued to expand its defence arrangements with foreign suppliers - this time for the building of 6 stealth submarines. It has asked for information from France, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Spain and Japan for the building of these advanced stealth submarines worth \$10.9 billion.
- The Sino-Indian border conflict flared up when the Chinese government demanded that India would have to withdraw its troops as a basic precondition for any meaningful dialogue.
- Tensions rose between the US and Russia with the former imposing sanctions and the latter, on 31 July, in retaliation, ordering the expulsion of 755 US staff members of the US diplomatic missions in Russia.
- Indian Muslims continued to be attacked and often killed by Hindu extremist mobs. On 23 July it was reported that an Indian Muslim was lynched by a mob in Maharashtra.
- Tensions between the US and Iran increased in the Persian Gulf after the US fired on an Iranian military vessel in the northern part of the Gulf.
- With new missile sanctions imposed on Iran by the US, Iranian President Rouhani stated Iran would respond “appropriately” to these while it sought to engage with world powers and remained committed to the nuclear agreement.
- The US policy on Syria reflected confusion when it was reported, according to the BBC on 20 July, that president Trump had ended the CIA's clandestine programme of providing weapons and supplies to Syrian rebel groups.

*--- Dr Shireen M Mazari*

*Director General*

## AMERICAS

### Domestic

- On 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan expressed his disappointment and frustration over the Senate's inability to repeal Obamacare.

*Ryan and several lawmakers expressed frustration after three Republican Senators opposed a bill to scale back parts of the US health law. The so-called "skinny" repeal is the Senate's third failed attempt to roll back Obamacare. It is considered a blow to Republicans who had vowed for years to repeal the law.*

- According to the *New York Times* on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017, White House Chief of Staff, Reince Priebus, was removed after a six-month tenure.

*John F. Kelly, the Secretary of Homeland Security and a retired four-star Marine General replaced Priebus. Trump announced the change via Twitter aboard Airforce One. Priebus, who was also accompanying the President, drove away without comment. Following Priebus' departure, Trump praised both his outgoing and incoming chiefs: "Reince is a good man;" "John Kelly will do a fantastic job. General Kelly has been a star, done an incredible job thus far, respected by everybody, a great, great, American. But Reince Priebus — a good man."*

- According to the *BBC*, on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the White House is yet to decide how it would implement the President's ban on transgender people serving in the US military.

*Rights groups criticized Trump's surprise Twitter announcement of 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017. Donald Trump tweeted, "The United States government will not accept or allow transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the US military." And further, "Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgenders in the military would entail." According to spokeswoman Sarah Sanders, the Administration would work alongside the Pentagon to decide how to proceed. It is also not clear how the announcement would affect currently serving transgender service personnel.*

- On 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the US Senate failed to pass a Republican proposal to repeal President Barack Obama's signature healthcare policy without replacing it.

*The 45-55 vote marks the second defeat for the Republicans. Earlier, the Senate rejected a plan to repeal and replace the health law with a Republican plan. Senators will now consider a "skinny" repeal, which would scale back some of the more controversial provisions. The plan would eliminate unpopular parts of Obamacare or the Affordable Care Act, including the requirement that all Americans have health insurance coverage as well as a tax on medical devices. If the measure passes, the Senate and House of Representatives would then be tasked with finalising a bill that could still change during negotiations. If successful, the full House and Senate would again have to approve the measure.*

- According to *USA Today*, on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the Transportation Security Administration announced that it would scrutinise electronics on domestic flights.

*Travelers at airports will now be required to remove all electronics larger than cellphones from carry-on bags and place them in a separate bin for X-ray screening. Travelers in Pre-check lanes will be able to leave electronics in their bags as they now do with laptops. According to the TSA, its goal is to get a clearer view of belongings in the jumble of carry-on bags after intelligence suggested that terrorists have found better ways to hide explosives in electronics. The stricter measures are already in place at 10 airports. They will be introduced gradually at all airports once workers have been trained.*

- According to State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert, on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has no plans to resign and is “just taking a little time off.”

*According to reports, a potential “Rexit” was brewing, i.e. Tillerson would resign before the end of 2017. The report pointed to Tillerson’s growing frustration with the Administration, exacerbated by President Trump’s public attacks on Attorney General Jeff Sessions. “The Secretary has been very clear he intends to stay here at the State Department,” Nauert told reporters when asked about the resignation rumours. Further, she stated: “We have a lot of work that is left to be done ahead of us. He recognizes that. He is deeply engaged in that work.”*

- On 20<sup>th</sup> July 2017, US President Donald Trump’s son, Donald Trump Jr, son-in-law Jared Kushner and former campaign manager Paul Manafort were asked to appear before US Senate committees to answer questions about the campaign’s alleged connections with Russia.

*The three are the closest associates of the President to be called upon to speak to legislators involved in probing Russian meddling in the 2016 US Presidential Election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign. Trump, who came into office in January, has been dogged by allegations that his campaign officials were connected with Russia, who US intelligence agencies have accused of interfering in the election. Trump has denied any wrongdoing.*

## **International**

- According to CNN, on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017, US President Donald Trump “ripped China for not reigning in Kim Jong Un and his missile programme.”

*“I am very disappointed in China,” Trump wrote in a pair of Twitter posts, “...they do NOTHING for us with North Korea, just talk. We will no longer allow this to continue. China could easily solve this problem!” North Korea tested an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the second of its kind during July 2017. The earlier test was conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017.*

- On 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017, the US said it would not call for a UN Security Council meeting over North Korea's missile tests because it would produce "nothing of consequence."

*According to US Ambassador Nikki Haley such a meeting would send a message to North Korea that the international community was unwilling to challenge it. The US responded by testing an anti-missile system and flying bombers over the Korean peninsula. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he had spoken to US President Donald Trump and that they had agreed on the need for further action on North Korea given its most recent missile test.*

- On 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2017, the US Congress reached an agreement on sanctions against Russia for meddling in the US Election and aggression toward its neighbours.

*They dismissed the White House's argument that President Trump needs flexibility to adjust the sanctions to fit his diplomatic initiatives with Moscow. The new legislation would sharply limit the President's ability to suspend or terminate the sanctions in what is being referred to as "a remarkable handcuffing by a Republican-led Congress" six months into Trump's tenure.*

- On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2017, the US said it would ban its citizens from travelling to North Korea.

*State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said, in a statement, that the ban would come into effect 30 days after being published. US officials linked the move to the death of jailed American student Otto Warmbier. Once the ban is in effect, US citizens will need special validation to travel to or within North Korea.*

- According to Reuters, on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2017, the United States said it would withhold \$50 million remaining in military reimbursements to Pakistan for fiscal year 2016.

*According to Defence Secretary Jim Mattis, Islamabad has not done enough against the Haqqani network. The decision is not the first time that the Pentagon has declined to make military reimbursements to Pakistan. In 2016, it withheld \$300 million. Pakistan has been reimbursed \$550 million of the \$900 million it was to receive in fiscal year 2016.*

- On 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the US accused Pakistan of not taking significant action against militant outfits and being unable to prevent them from operating through Pakistan-based safe havens.

*According to the US State Department's 2016 Country Report on Terrorism, the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LT), and Jaish-i-Muhammad (JM) are "groups located in Pakistan, but focused on conducting attacks outside the country." The report said that the government had failed to take any significant action against Jaish-i-Muhammad (JM) or Lashkar-i-Taiba (LT), "other than implementing an ongoing ban against media coverage of their activities."*

- On 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017, President Trump announced his decision to end the CIA's covert program to arm and train moderate Syrian rebels against the government of Bashar al-Assad.

*Russia had long sought the move. The program was central to a policy begun by the Obama administration in 2013 to put pressure on Assad to step aside. However, even its supporters have questioned its efficacy since Russia deployed forces in Syria two years later. According to officials, the phasing out of the secret program reflects Trump's interest in finding ways to work with Russia, which saw the anti-Assad program as "an assault on its interests." The decision is also an acknowledgment of Washington's limited leverage and desire to remove Assad from power.*

- On 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the US announced its decision to impose fresh sanctions against Iran over its ballistic missile programme and the country's alleged support for terror organisations.

*Eighteen entities or individuals would be affected by the new measures. The US said all 18 entities/individuals had supported Iran's ballistic missile programme or the elite Republican Guards Corps. The statement also criticised Iran's support for the Syrian government and groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas.*

## **Latin America**

- According to reports on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017, electoral officials in Venezuela claimed turnout in the controversial election for a constituent assembly was 41.5%.

*The opposition disputed the figure. The opposition coalition stated that 88% of voters abstained, thereby refusing to recognise the election. The opposition also called for more protests on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017. The 30<sup>th</sup> July election was marred by violence, with widespread protests resulting in at least 10 people being killed.*

- On 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the Brazilian armed forces began deploying 10,000 troops in the state of Rio de Janeiro to help the fight organised crime.

*8,500 soldiers were mobilised. Police and highway patrol officers will join them. Violence has increased in Rio since the end of the Olympics in 2016. More than 90 police officers have been killed in Rio state so far in 2017.*

- On 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the US government imposed sanctions on 13 senior Venezuelan officials.

*The decision comes amid increasing pressure on President Nicolás Maduro ahead of a controversial vote for a new Constituent Assembly. The sanctions freeze the US assets of 13 individuals including the country's Interior Minister. President Trump had vowed "strong and swift economic actions" if Maduro holds the poll. Maduro stated: "Who do these imperialists in the United States think they are?... The government of the world?" He also called the sanctions "illegal, insolent and unprecedented." According to Venezuela, the vote will proceed as planned. It will choose 545 members of a new Constituent Assembly to rival the opposition-held National Assembly.*

*---Amina Afzal*

## ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On July 30, Pakistan signed an agreement with Azerbaijan for the sale of 10 Super Mushshak aircraft to the country.

*The contract was signed in Azerbaijan by Air Marshal Arshad Malik, Chairman Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC), Kamra, and Lt Gen Ramiz Tahirov, Azerbaijan Air Force Commander. Under the agreement, Pakistan will also provide operational training and technical support & assistance to Azerbaijan Air Force. The indigenously produced Super Mashshak aircraft is equipped with most modern equipment and capabilities making it one of the best military trainer aircraft. Approximately 300 Super Mashshak aircraft are being used by Pakistan Air Force and Pakistan Army for military training of pilots and other defence related activities.*

- According to Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on July 28, North Korea conducted a second successful test of its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Hwasong-14.

*KCNA said that the test confirmed the overall technological specifications and the maximum range of the weapon system capable of carrying large-sized heavy nuclear warheads. The missile was launched from the northwestern part of the country and reached an altitude of 3,724.9 km. It flew 998 km for 47 minutes and 12 seconds before landing into the Sea of Japan. Supreme leader Kim Jong Un said that the test of the Hwasong-14 “reconfirmed the reliability of ICBM system, demonstrated the capability of making a surprise launch of ICBM in any region and place any time, and clearly proved that the whole US mainland is in the firing range of the missile.” The US, South Korea and Japan confirmed and condemned the launch. Regarding the range of the missile, David Wright, a physicist and co-director of the global security programme at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said that if reports of the missile’s maximum altitude and flight time are correct, it would have a theoretical range of at least 10,400 km. With this range, the missile is capable of reaching Los Angeles, Denver or Chicago, depending on variables such as the size and weight of the warhead. The first test of Hwasong-14 was conducted on July 4, 2017. Experts noted that the altitude and flight time of the latest test of the missile suggested it was significantly more powerful than the July 4 test.*

- On July 28, Pakistan inducted PNS HIMMAT, the missile capable Fast Attack Craft built at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works Limited (KS&EW) into its naval fleet.

*The PNS Himmat is a 63-meter-long fast attack craft, fitted with state-of-the-art systems. An important achievement of this project is the installation of an indigenously built missile system. The craft has also been fitted with various other weapons and sensors for the manifestation of speed and lethality at par with any modern navy arsenal. Speaking at the commissioning and induction ceremony, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Mohammad Zakaullah, said that it was a landmark occasion when the second indigenously constructed fast attack craft was being inducted in the Pakistan Navy fleet. He said that the successful construction of PNS Himmat at the Karachi Shipyard was a proud moment for Pakistan Navy, KS&EW and China State*

*Shipbuilding and Offshore Company. He said that the acquisition of high-speed missile craft with enhanced endurance and firepower remained a high priority in order to attain the capability to deliver rapid response at sea thereby addressing security challenges at sea.*

- On July 27, US Senate approved a bill with a vote of 98-2, imposing tough sanctions against Russia, Iran and North Korea.
- On July 17, US President Donald Trump's Administration declared that Iran was complying with its nuclear agreement signed with world powers in July 2015.

*The bill was earlier passed by the House of Representatives on July 25, 2017. The bill would now go to the White House for US President Donald Trump's final approval. Senator John McCain, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said, "This legislation finally holds Russia accountable for its brazen attack on America's 2016 presidential election by imposing new sanctions and strengthening existing sanctions on the country." The bill also includes sanctions on Iran owing to its alleged support for terrorism and against North Korea for its continued missile tests. In response, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that Moscow would retaliate against the US if the sanctions were approved by Trump. While criticising the bill, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi called the bill as "a completely clear hostile act" that would be met with a definitive response. In a related development, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recertified Iran's compliance with its July 2015 nuclear agreement on July 17, 2017. Under US law, the State Department is required to recertify to Congress Iran's compliance with the nuclear deal every 90 days. It was the second time that Trump certified Iranian compliance with the agreement since he took office in January 2017, despite criticising it during the 2016 electoral campaign as the worst deal.*

- On July 27, Iran successfully launched an advanced satellite-carrying rocket into space.

*According to Iranian state media, the Imam Khomeini Space Centre was officially inaugurated with the successful test of the Simorgh rocket whose name translates to "phoenix" in Persian. The Simorgh is capable of carrying a 250 kg satellite. The Imam Khomeini Space Centre is a large complex that includes all stages of the preparation, launch, control and guidance of satellites. Its launch marks a significant advancement of Iran's advancing space programme, which conducted its last successful satellite rocket launch in February 2015. In response, US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on six Iran-based satellite companies on July 28, 2017. The companies are owned by the Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group, an entity central to Iran's ballistic missile programme. Heather Nauert, US State Department spokesperson, said that the US considers Iran's satellite rocket launch as a continued ballistic missile development programme and it is inconsistent with the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, adopted in 2015, that restricts the country from testing ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons.*

- On July 27, the US reaffirmed its support to India's membership into Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and called on other members of the group to back New Delhi's application.

*The US Department of Defence and Department of State submitted a joint report to the Congress, as required under National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) 2017, in which it reiterated the support by the US towards the inclusion of India in the NSG. The US has also reaffirmed its support for India's membership in the Australia Group and Wassenaar Arrangement. India formally applied for NSG's membership in May 2016 and has been making serious efforts to become its member. However, the country's membership is primarily blocked by China on the grounds that India is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). China's opposition has made India's entry into the group difficult as it is guided by the consensus principle.*

- According to the *Times of India* on July 24, India initiated its 'mother of all underwater defence deals' with France, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Spain and Japan to build six advanced stealth submarines worth \$10.9 billion.

*The conventional submarine programme, called Project-75, would be India's first mega project under the new "strategic partnership" policy finalised by India's Defence Ministry in May 2017. India had issued a request for information (RFI) to six foreign shipbuilders on July 19, 2017. The six foreign shipbuilders, Naval Group-DCNS (France), ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (Germany), Rosoboronexport Rubin Design Bureau (Russia), Navantia (Spain), Saab (Sweden) and the Mitsubishi-Kawasaki Heavy Industries combine (Japan), are expected to respond to the RFI by September 15, 2017. The Indian Navy does not only want the six new diesel-electric submarines to have land-attack cruise missiles, air-independent propulsion for greater underwater endurance and the capability to integrate indigenous weapons and sensors, but also expects transfer of technology from the manufacturers. Under Project-75, six French Scorpene-class submarines are also being built in Mazagon Dock Limited in Mumbai and would be delivered by 2021.*

- On July 22, Gen. Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, acknowledged that North Korea has the ability to launch a "limited missile attack," and that US forces are able to defend such a move against the US and its allies in North-East Asia.

*Dunford said, "Kim Jong Un's regime is tied to nuclear programme, and what I can tell the American people today is North Korea is capable of launching a limited missile attack." Earlier, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Paul Selva had also told the Senate Armed Services Committee on July 18, 2017, that North Korea's missiles might have the range to hit US targets. Regarding North Korea's denuclearisation, Dunford called a military solution horrific and said that it was best to approach the issue through diplomatic and economic means.*

- On July 20, the Indo-Japanese civil nuclear deal came into force enabling Japan to export nuclear power plant technology and to provide finance for nuclear power plants in India.

*According to India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar and Japanese ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu exchanged diplomatic notes, marking the operationalisation of the deal. The MEA's official spokesperson Gopal Baglay said, "This agreement is a reflection of the strategic partnership between India and Japan and will pave the way for enhanced cooperation in energy security and clean energy." Under the deal, Japan would also assist India in nuclear waste management and the countries could undertake joint manufacture of nuclear power plant components under the so-called 'Make in India' initiative. Japanese industrial conglomerate Toshiba, which owns Westinghouse, would have a major role when the US supplies nuclear technology for the six reactors in Andhra Pradesh. Both India and Japan signed the civil nuclear cooperation deal in November 2016 and the Japanese Diet approved it in June 2017. India is the only country that has not signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and yet Japan has signed a civil nuclear deal with it.*

*Moiz Khan*

## CHINA & EAST ASIA

### China

- On July 26, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Lu Kang said that a withdrawal of Indian troops “would be the precondition and basis for any meaningful dialogue.”
- In a related development on July 24, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman, Wu Qian, said China would protect its territorial sovereignty “at all costs.”

*Lu Kang maintained that Indian troops had illegally crossed the border into China and called for India to immediately withdraw troops to “avoid further escalating the situation.” China views the withdrawal of Indian troops from the Doklam region as a prerequisite for resolving the border standoff. Beijing has also rejected Indian offers of bilateral talks until Indian troops are withdrawn from the Doklam area. However, China and India have exercised restraint so far and maintain that they want a peaceful solution to the issue. Earlier, on July 20, 2017, Indian External Affairs Minister, Shushma Swaraj, asked China to withdraw troops from the tri-junction if it wants India to do the same. The continued flexing of military muscles between the two regional powers could pose a serious threat to regional peace. On July 27, 2017, Indian National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval visited China and held talks with his Chinese counterpart and State Councillor, Yang Jiechi on the sidelines of the BRICS NSA meeting.*

- On July 30, Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed the need to build a world-class military, that is capable of “defeating all invading enemies” and is loyal to the ruling Communist Party.

*President Xi Jinping made the remarks while addressing the 90th anniversary of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), at Zhurihe training base in China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.*

- On July 18, Chinese President Xi Jinping said that China supports a political settlement of the Palestinian issue on the basis of the two-state solution.

*President Xi’s remarks follow a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on July 18, 2017 in Beijing. President Xi also said the UN Security Council Resolution 2334 should be effectively implemented and all the settlement building on the occupied territories of Palestine should be immediately stopped. In recent years, China has expanded its diplomatic outreach in the Middle East and has also offered to host talks to resolve the ongoing crisis in Syria.*

### South Korea

- According to *Al Jazeera* on July 21, the South Korean Defense Ministry urged North Korea to respond to its “talks proposal.”

*The dual statements, the first of those issued by the Presidency of newly elected President Moon Jae-In, come amid renewed global backlash over the recent advancement of the North's nuclear capabilities. The inter-Korea talks, are aimed at "reducing tension between two Koreas... to achieve peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula." The North has so far remained silent over the offers.*

## **North Korea**

- On July 21, the US State Department spokeswoman, Heather Nauert said that the US government will ban American citizens from traveling to North Korea because of "mounting concerns over the serious risk of arrest and long-term detention."

*She said that Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson authorised a "geographical travel restriction" on all US nationals' use "of a passport to travel in, through, or to North Korea." The development follows the death of Otto Warmbier, a student who was arrested by North Korean authorities and charged with stealing a propaganda poster in 2016 while on a tour to North Korea. Warmbier was in a coma when he was released and flown back to the US in June 2017, where he died after a few days.*

## **Japan**

- According to *Japan Times* on July 28, Japanese Defence Minister, Tomomi Inada resigned following allegations of a cover-up of logs detailing the activities of Japanese troops serving as UN peacekeepers in South Sudan.

*During Inada's tenure, the Japanese Ministry of Defence was found to have misled Japanese lawmakers over the role of Japan's Self-Defense Force (SDF) at a UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan by obscuring daily activity logs.*

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

## EUROPE

- According to the *BBC* on July 31, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that 755 staff would be expelled from US diplomatic missions in Russia, in retaliation for new US sanctions against Moscow.

*The decision to expel staff was made on July 28 but the President confirmed the number who must leave by September 1, 2017. The expulsion will bring staff levels to 455, the same as the Russian Embassy in Washington. It is the largest expulsion of diplomats from any country in modern history. The number includes Russian employees of the US diplomatic missions across Russia. Staff at the Embassy in Moscow as well as the consulates in Ekaterinburg, Vladivostok and St Petersburg would be removed. The US said the move was a “regrettable and uncalled for act.”*

- On July 30, Georgia and the US launched their biggest-ever joint military exercises.

*Georgia wants to push its bid to join NATO. US Vice-President Mike Pence will visit Georgia later this week to back the plan. Russia however strongly opposes it. Georgia and Russia have had fractious relations over two breakaway republics and fought a brief war in 2008. Meanwhile Russia staged its own show of force with President Putin joining a naval display in St Petersburg. The US-Georgia military drills, dubbed Noble Partner, involve 1,600 US and 800 Georgian troops. The US has also deployed M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks and M2 Bradley infantry vehicles for the exercises, which will go on until August 12, 2017. A number of other countries including the UK are also participating in the exercise.*

- According to UK Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis on July 27, a new immigration system will be in place by March 2019 when the free movement of people between the EU and the UK ends.

*The government commissioned a “detailed assessment” of the costs and benefits of EU migrants. That report is expected in September 2018. Meanwhile Home Secretary Amber Rudd reassured companies that the UK would continue to attract “the brightest and the best” migrants from around the world. According to reports a work permit system for Europeans is being considered.*

- On July 26, Russian legislators called for “painful” measures against the US in response to plans for new US sanctions.

*Many in Russia believe there is no hope for improved relations with Washington under a Trump Administration. According to the Kremlin the proposed new US sanctions against Russia are an extremely unfriendly act and sad news for Russia-US relations. There were also suggestions that “European pique over the proposed measures” had provided an avenue for an anti-American alliance. Meanwhile France, Germany and the EU also criticised the sanctions amid concerns that the measures could affect European businesses. Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, warned the EU would hit back “within a matter of days” if the sanctions damaged European economic interests. Juncker expressed his anger at Washington’s inability to work with the EU. He said, “America first cannot mean that Europe’s interests come last.”*

- On July 26, Mariano Rajoy became the first serving Spanish Prime Minister to testify in court.

*Rajoy denied knowledge of an alleged illegal financing scheme within his Popular Party (PP). He said his role at the party was political and strategic, not financial. According to prosecution during the pre-2008 property boom, companies gave former PP lawmakers and civil servants kickbacks in return for contracts. Rajoy is not accused of wrongdoing however. His request to testify by video link was denied. However he was seated on the same platform as the judges, not in the traditional witness stand. Thirty-seven people, including three former PP treasurers, are on trial in the case that centres on the alleged ringleader, businessman Francisco Correa. Correa is already serving a 13-year sentence for influence peddling and bribery, and could face up to 125 years.*

- On July 26, Sven Lau, a preacher who was found guilty of supporting the Jamwa group of foreign fighters in Syria was jailed for five-and-a-half years in Germany.

*Lau recruited two fighters and provided the group with money and night-vision goggles. Prosecutors had sought a longer sentence from the Düsseldorf court. Lau gained notoriety when he created his own self-styled “Sharia police” patrols in Wuppertal, Germany. He was detained in December 2015 in Mönchengladbach, where he grew up. In 2013 Lau transported two fighters from Germany to join Jamwa Jaysh al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar (Army of the Emigrants and Helpers) and provided equipment and funds masquerading as humanitarian aid.*

- On July 26, the European Commission threatened legal action against Poland over plans to give politicians more power to sack and appoint judges.

*The Commission said Poland would be stripped of its EU voting rights if it went ahead with proposals to force all Supreme Court judges into retirement. Warsaw criticised the EU “blackmail.” Poland’s President has vetoed two of the most controversial bills, but the government wants to press on with them, despite mass street protests. The Commission said it would launch immediate action to strip Poland of its voting rights if Warsaw went ahead with it anyway. Such a penalty, known as Article 7, requires the agreement of all EU member states, and Hungary says it will back Poland. A more realistic sanction would be the threat of hefty fines imposed by the European Court of Justice.*

- On July 26 the European Court of Justice ruled that a law requiring refugees to seek asylum in the first country they reach applies even in exceptional circumstances.

*The case was brought by Austria and Slovenia. It could affect the future of several hundred refugees who arrived during 2015-16. The ruling concerns two Afghan families and a Syrian who applied for asylum after leaving Croatia. The court ruled it was Croatia’s responsibility to decide their cases. Under the Dublin regulation, refugees have to seek asylum in the first EU state they reach. However Germany suspended the Dublin regulation for Syrian refugees, halting deportations to the countries they arrived in.*

- According to the BBC on July 26, wildfires in South-Eastern France forced the evacuation of 10,000 people overnight.

*Hundreds of firefighters were deployed to battle the fires near Bormes-les-Mimosas, in the country’s Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region. France earlier asked its EU neighbours for more help fighting the fires.*

- On July 26, the EU expressed concern over US plans to impose fresh sanctions on Russia, amid concern they could hurt energy companies.

*The EU Commission expressed concern after the US House of Representatives voted in favour of the measures, despite opposition from Donald Trump. The bill is likely to complicate the US President’s hopes of improving relations with Russia. It aims to punish Russia for alleged interference in the 2016 US election.*

- On July 25, Federica Mogherini, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs

dismissed calls for a tougher line on human rights abuses in Turkey.

*Mogherini said it was important to keep a dialogue open with Ankara. “Clearly Turkey is and stays a candidate country,” she told reporters. “Many of our colleagues prefer to focus on the red lines. I prefer to focus on what we have in common.” The statement followed talks with Turkish Ministers and comes at a time when there is pressure on Brussels to show its condemnation of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Turkish President, since the attempted coup in 2016.*

- According to the IMF on July 24, the UK and US economies will expand more slowly in 2017 than previously predicted.

*It said “weaker-than-expected activity” in the first three months of 2017 meant the UK would grow by 1.7%, compared to an earlier forecast predicting 2%. The IMF also revised its US growth forecast from 2.3% to 2.1%. However the overall global economic predictions of 3.5% growth in 2017 and 3.6% in 2018 remain the same.*

- On July 20, Poland’s Lower House of Parliament passed controversial new reforms, which will see all Supreme Court judges removed and replaced.

*The Law and Justice Party said it would make the judicial system more effective and able to fight against corruption. However critics say it is a threat to the rule of law. Donald Tusk, European Council President and former Polish Prime Minister called the changes “backward.”*

- On July 19, Italy said it is considering issuing temporary humanitarian visas to allow tens of thousands of migrants who have arrived in the country from Libya.

*According to observers, the move would provoke an immediate Austrian response, including the closure of its border with Italy at the Brenner Pass. The chances of Italy being able legally to grant unilateral humanitarian visas are slim. The refugee crisis is putting growing political domestic pressure on the Democratic Party (PD)-led government, with PD mayors refusing to take extra migrants and plans for legislation on citizenship being shelved by Italian Prime Minister, Paolo Gentiloni.*

- On July 19, Britain warned the EU that it could return “boatloads of radioactive waste” to the continent if Brexit fails to deliver an agreement on nuclear regulation.

*According to a paper setting out the UK position for the negotiations, the country retains the right “to return radioactive waste ... to its country of origin” should negotiations collapse. The paper also outlines the British government’s hopes for future cooperation once it leaves the Euratom treaty, and the EU. It further stresses the “strong mutual interest in ensuring close cooperation in the future”.*

- On July 19, Gen Pierre de Villiers, the Head of the French Armed Forces quit after a clash with President Emmanuel Macron over budget cuts.

*He said in a statement he could no longer “guarantee the durability of the army model” that was necessary to ensure the country’s protection. Earlier last week the French government revealed major cuts to bring its budget deficit below the level of an EU cap. President Macron had said he would not tolerate dissent from the military. In a speech at the Defence Ministry he said, “It is not dignified to hold certain debates in the public arena.” Later, during an interview with Le Journal du Dimanche, he said, “If the military chief of staff and the president are opposed on something, the military chief of staff goes.” However he also said the General had his “full trust” as long as he “knows the chain of command and how it works.”*

- On July 17, the Russian Supreme Court ordered the disbanding of the Jehovah’s Witnesses on Russian territory.

*The Court rejected an appeal by the religious group against a ruling in April 2017 declaring it to be extremist. The Justice Ministry had argued that the group distributed pamphlets inciting hatred against other groups. The denomination says it has 175,000 members in Russia. Approximately 8,000,000 people worldwide are part of the Christian-based movement.*

- On July 16, thousands of Poles took to the streets across the country to condemn a controversial reform of the judiciary.

*According to protesters the bill, passed by the Senate, will erode judges’ independence and undermine democracy. It gives MPs and the Justice Minister the power to appoint judges without consulting judicial circles. The government says the move is needed because the judiciary is corrupt and serves only the interests of elites. President Andrzej Duda has given no indication that he plans to veto the law. Since coming to office in 2015, the government of the conservative,*

*populist Law and Justice party (PiS), has passed a series of controversial reforms, triggering mass protests.*

*--- Amina Afzal*

## MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

### Iran

- On 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017, a US Navy patrol ship fired warning shots at an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) vessel in the Persian Gulf after it approached within about 135 metres of the ship.

*The incident occurred in the northern Persian Gulf, when the Iranian vessel began to approach the USS Thunderbolt. According to US Defence officials, the boat was coming in at high speed: 'It did not respond to any signals; they did not respond to any bridge-to-bridge calls, they felt there was no choice except to fire the warning shots.' The US Fifth Fleet, which is based in Bahrain and oversees the US ship involved, refused to provide additional details. The episode marks the latest in a series of close encounters between US ships and Iranian Naval vessels.*

- On 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani stressed that Tehran remained committed to its nuclear deal with world powers. He also said his country would 'respond appropriately' to new US sanctions.

*During a televised cabinet meeting, President Rouhani stated, "Iran will always stick to its international commitment. But if the US wants to press forward with new sanctions under any pretext ... the great nation of Iran will respond appropriately. We will not forgive violations by the Americans and we will stand against them." His comments came a day after the US and Iran traded sanctions over the Iranian ballistic missile programme. The State Department imposed sanctions on 18 individuals and entities in Iran, soon after the White House admitted Tehran was adhering to the 2015 P5+1 agreement. Iran hit back with its own sanctions against 'American people and entities that have acted against the Iranian people and other Muslim peoples of the region.' The Iranian Parliament voted to approve a bill that would increase funding for the country's missile programme and Revolutionary Guards in response to Washington's 'adventurism' in the region. An overwhelming majority of lawmakers voted to prioritise the motion that would see an additional \$260 million allocated to the missile programme and the same amount to the elite Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations wing, the Quds Force.*

### Iraq

- On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Iraqi Vice President, Nouri al-Maliki, called for "substantial" Russian military and political presence in the country, arguing this would bring "balance" to the entire region.

*During his meeting with Valentina Matviyenko, the Speaker of Russia's Upper House of Parliament, in Moscow, al-Maliki stated: "It's well known that Russia has historically strong relations with Iraq, therefore, we would like Russia to have a substantial presence in our*

country, both politically and militarily. This way, a balance would be established that would benefit the region, its peoples and its countries.” Matviyenko welcomed Baghdad’s desire to boost ties with Moscow, stating: “Russia is also determined to expand its interaction with Iraq both politically and economically as well as in the military-technical sphere, and, of course, on the parliamentary level.” Earlier, on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2017, during his talks with Russia’s Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, al-Maliki stressed that Russian presence in Iraq would ensure a balance, which wouldn’t be “undermined in a political sense in favour of any external party.” Lavrov affirmed that Moscow supports the efforts of the Iraqi authorities to “normalise the situation in the country, first of all aiming at eradicating the terrorist threat.” He further stated: “It’s vital that Baghdad’s struggle isn’t carried out in isolation, but is carried on in the context of international efforts to eradicate the terrorist threat across the globe, including in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and other countries.” On 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2017, Maliki criticised the US role in Iraq, saying Washington had in the first place contributed to the emergence of Daesh terrorist group and Washington now seeks to establish military bases on Iraqi territory in an attempt to maintain influence in the region.

## **Israel**

- On 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was recorded on a live microphone criticising the European Union’s “crazy” insistence on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a precondition for closer ties. He also made a rare public admission that Israel has struck Iranian arms convoys in Syria bound for Hezbollah “dozens and dozens of times”.

Netanyahu was meeting the leaders of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia at a regional summit. He was discussing Iran, Syria, Daesh, and EU-Israel relations when some of his comments and those of other leaders at the meeting closed to the media were accidentally broadcast to journalists in another room covering the conference. He was overheard saying, “it’s crazy. I think it’s actually crazy” that the 28-nation bloc maintains that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must come before closer trade ties. He further claimed: “Europe is undermining its progress by undermining the connection with Israeli innovation because of a crazy attempt to create conditions. European ties with Israel would determine whether the 28-member Union would live and thrive or shrivel and disappear.” The remarks underlined Netanyahu’s often barely disguised contempt for the EU, which has criticised Israel over issues including Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the peace process. In a related development on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron told Netanyahu, who was on a visit to France, that Paris opposes Israel’s expansion of settlements in occupied Palestinian territory as he urged fresh Middle East peace talks.

## **Kuwait**

- On July 16, French Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian held talks with top officials in Kuwait in an effort to support the country's attempts to mediate in the Gulf crisis.

*Le Drian met with Kuwaiti Emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Foreign Minister, Sabah Al Khalid Al Sabah, for talks on a regional rift, which has seen Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain sever all ties with Qatar. Le Drian, also visited UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia during his Gulf tour. He has been supporting Kuwait as a mediator in the Gulf crisis, which he said should be resolved 'by the Gulf countries themselves'. During his visit to Saudi Arabia, Le Drian said, "France does not want to substitute the mediator, it wants to be a facilitator by joining efforts of other countries." Le Drian's visit followed a four-day mediation mission by US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, which failed to achieve any progress towards defusing tensions in the Gulf. Earlier, on July 15, 2017, while talking to reporters in Qatar, Le Drian urged Qatar's neighbours to immediately lift the blockade impacting thousands of people in the Gulf and said such punitive measures should end.*

## **Libya**

- Following the July 25 French-brokered peace talks in Paris, the two main rivals in Libya committed to a ceasefire and early elections.

*The newly appointed UN envoy for Libya, Ghassan Salamé, chaired the talks. French President, Emmanuel Macron made a statement at the end insisting that "civil war in Libya is not inevitable." Macron said the two rival leaders could become symbols of a national reconciliation. According to the Communiqué, Libya's UN-backed Prime Minister, Fayez al-Sarraj and Khalifa Haftar, the military commander who controls the remote east of the country, both accept that only a political solution can end the crisis. Macron praised the two sides and said that al-Sarraj and Haftar had displayed "historic courage" at the talks outside Paris. According to diplomatic sources, the two sides had agreed to a joint statement but the text being circulated was not the final version. According to the 10-point version, the ceasefire would not apply to counter-terrorism efforts and also that the two sides remain committed to developing the rule of law. According to observers, Macron is committed to persuade the two sides to agree on a roadmap to end the conflict.*

## **Qatar**

- On July 30, the Foreign Ministers of four Arab states boycotting Qatar said they would make no compromises in their demand of change in Doha's policies.

- On July 28, Qatari government Spokesman, Sheikh Saif bin Ahmed Al-Thani said that his country would not bow to Saudi-led demands to 'outsource' its foreign policy to resolve the Gulf crisis.

*The Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt, who met in Manama, said they were open to talks with Qatar on condition it 'stops its support and financing of terrorism'. A joint statement released after the meeting said, "We reiterate the importance of Qatar's compliance with the 13 demands outlined by the four states." Saudi Arabia and its allies also accused Qatar of complicating Hajj for its citizens, who cannot take direct flights from Doha to Saudi Arabia under the sanctions. Sheikh Saif accused Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt of meddling in Qatar's internal affairs. He said, "What's behind this crisis of course is Qatari sovereignty and independence to put it very simply. It is about outsourcing our foreign policy so that decisions are not made in Qatar, and that is something that will never be acceptable." On July 28, 2017, Qatar's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani stated that the UN should play a role in resolving the Gulf crisis. He accused the Saudi-led bloc of violating international law by imposing a blockade on Qatar. He also said that Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and Egypt have not taken any concrete steps to resolve the crisis. According to Sheikh Mohammad, the UN is the right platform to start from since it is the job of the Security Council and General Assembly to resolve such issues.*

*Earlier, on July 25, 2017, Saudi Arabia and its allies unveiled a new blacklist of 18 terrorist organisations and individuals they said had ties with Qatar. The list included Yemeni, Qatari, Libyan and Kuwaiti citizens. These listed individuals are related to media groups and charitable organisations. On July 27, 2017, Qatar expressed its reservation on the terror list released by the Saudi-led bloc. The country termed the list a "disappointing surprise" stating that the list is baseless since Qatar denies ties with any of the terrorist groups added to the terror list. On July 26, 2017, a conference on human rights and media freedom held in Doha condemned the actions of Saudi Arabia and its allies. The conference was held following the issuance of new list of terror groups and individuals related to Qatar. The country denied all allegations and Qatari Foreign Minister accused the Saudi-led bloc of undermining the mediation process.*

- On July 24, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived in Doha as part of a Gulf tour aimed at defusing the Gulf crisis.

*Erdogan held talks with Qatari ruler Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. According to his spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, the visit was focused on 'developments in Syria and Iraq, the fight against terrorism and the importance of protecting countries' sovereign rights'. Turkey has sided with Qatar in the Gulf crisis. Qatar has emerged as Turkey's top ally in the Middle East with Ankara and Doha closely coordinating over issues including the Syria conflict where the two are staunch foes of President Bashar al-Assad. Turkey is also setting up a military base in Qatar. It has expedited the process since the crisis began and now has around 150 troops in the country.*

## Syria

- On July 30, Damascus called on the UN to end Washington's crimes against Syrian civilians. It also said the US is systematically targeting residential areas.

*The Syrian Foreign Ministry sent two letters to UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres and the Chairman of the UN Security Council, urging to dissolve the US-led coalition in Syria, which is operating in the country without permission from Damascus. The letter stated, "The US-led international coalition continues to commit massacres against Syrian innocent civilians through conducting systematic airstrikes on the provinces of Raqqah, Hasakah, Aleppo and Dayr al-Zawr on a daily basis." The letters were sent after at least six civilians were killed and many injured in a US-led series of airstrikes in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr. The letters noted that the coalition's member states continue to support terrorist groups such as Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra. The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It remains incapable of fulfilling its declared aim of destroying Daesh.*

- On July 27, Russian President, Vladimir Putin signed a law enabling the country's Air Forces to remain in Syria for 49 years as part of a protocol to a 2015 agreement with the Damascus government.

*The protocol was signed by Moscow and Damascus in January 2017, regulating issues related to the deployment of Air Forces on the Syrian territory. On July 14, 2017, Russian State Duma, the Lower House of the Russian Parliament adopted the protocol. It contains an option that enables automatic extension of the arrangement for another 25 years. The protocol also features Damascus' agreement to provide the Russian Air Force with free land in its northwestern Latakia Province. Russia has been using the Khmeimim Air Base there to carry out anti-terror operations since September 2015. The Russian military has also been offering advisory support to Syria, helping the country in its fight against terrorists.*

- BBC reported on July 20 that US President, Donald Trump has ended the CIA's clandestine programme to provide weapons and supplies to Syrian rebel groups.

*According to the Washington Post, President Trump made his decision after a meeting in the Oval Office with National Security Adviser, H R McMaster and CIA Director, Mike Pompeo and before he held talks with Russian President, Vladimir Putin at the G20 Summit in Germany on July 7, 2017. The support programme began in 2013 as Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, decided to put pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to stand down. The decision to halt it was made almost a month ago, by which time the flow of arms had already slowed significantly. According to US officials, the move was part of an effort to improve ties with Russia.*

## **UAE**

- On July 17, UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash said the Emirates was not responsible for an alleged hack of Qatari websites which helped spark a diplomatic rift with Doha.
- On July 16, citing US intelligence officials, the *Washington Post* reported that UAE had orchestrated the hacking of Qatari government news and social media sites posting incendiary false quotes attributed to Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani

*According to US officials, senior members of the UAE government discussed the plan and its implementation. However, it remains unclear whether the UAE carried out the hacks itself or through contractors. The false reports said that the Emir, among other things, had called Iran an "Islamic power" and praised Hamas. Minister Gargash denied this story as being false. During his talk at the London-based think-tank Chatham House, Gargash said, "The Washington Post story today that we actually hacked the Qataris is also not true." He also said the four Arab powers were in the process of discussing additional sanctions on Doha. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt imposed sanctions on Qatar in June 2017, cutting diplomatic and transport ties with the country, after accusing it of financing militant groups and supporting their regional rival Iran. Gargash suggested international monitoring of Qatar and said there were no plans for a meeting between the two sides under the auspices of Kuwait, which has been seeking to mediate in the dispute.*

## **Yemen**

- According to Yemen's official SABA news agency, on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017, at least 12 Emirati soldiers were killed and 23 injured when Yemen's Navy attacked an Emirati military vessel with a guided missile near the port city of Mukha.

*According to a Yemeni military source, Yemeni naval soldiers, backed by allied fighters from Popular Committees, targeted an Emirati military vessel in a missile attack off the coast of the country's southwestern province of Taiz. The vessel was heavily loaded with various munitions, and the missile attack sent it into a series of explosions. Meanwhile, the Yemeni Navy has warned the Saudi-led military coalition against adventurism in the Red Sea, stopping humanitarian convoys from reaching the strategic port city of Hudaydah and attacks on Yemeni fishermen. According to the Yemeni Navy, the escalation in confrontations in the Red Sea does not serve the interests of any side and Yemeni fighters would not hesitate in giving a befitting response to any act of aggression against their country.*

*---Muhammad Shoaib*

## SOUTH ASIA

### Pakistan

#### External

- On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2017, four Pakistan Army soldiers were killed in Azad Jammu & Kashmir's (AJK) Athmuqam sector, after their vehicle was attacked by Indian troops from across the Line of Control (LoC).
- On 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Pakistan threatened to block India's supply lines near the LoC. The warning follows Pakistan's Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) hotline contact with his Indian counterpart. The Pakistani DGMO warned that hostilities could turn into a major military standoff.
- On 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, two civilians and a Pakistani soldier were killed after Indian troops initiated shelling from across the LoC in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.
- According to the Pakistan Army, on 19<sup>th</sup> July, five Indian soldiers were killed in "retaliatory fire" by Pakistani forces along the LoC. Pakistan's Military also guaranteed "aggressive" response to every Indian ceasefire violation.

*India denied that any of its soldiers had been killed and, instead, alleged that a woman was injured after Pakistani troops violated the ceasefire in Poonch. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Army rejected the Indian allegation that it had targeted the civilian population in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), stating instead that Pakistani forces would not target their own people living across the LOC. Pakistan also summoned the Indian Deputy High Commissioner, JP Singh, to protest the Indian violations. This is the third time in a period of one month that Pakistan has summoned the Indian High Commissioner over the escalating situation at the LoC. Pakistan also called on the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) to play its role according to UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. Meanwhile, the Indian DGMO alleged, on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017, that all ceasefire violations were being initiated by the Pakistan Army.*

*There is a marked increase in truce violations at the LoC under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. According to Pakistan's Foreign Office, thus far India has committed more than 580 ceasefire violations in 2017. As the situation continues to escalate between Pakistan and India, security analysts fear that the two sides are now heading closer to war. On 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Pakistan's Adviser on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz said that, "Jammu and Kashmir resolution is imperative for peace in South Asia." The adviser's remarks came after his meeting with representatives of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017.*

- According to *Dawn*, on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited the Maldives to participate in the country's 52nd Independence Day celebrations, to take place on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, as the chief guest of the event.

*During his visit, the PM held talks with the President of the Maldives, H.E. Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayoom. According to media reports, a number of MoUs and agreements for cooperation in various fields were also signed.*

- According to the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa met General John Nicholson, Commander, Resolute Support Mission (RSM) and US Forces in Afghanistan, at the General Headquarters (GHQ), in Rawalpindi.

*During the meeting, Pakistan's military chief raised concerns over a "blame game perpetrated by some quarters in Afghanistan and US to undermine Pakistan's contributions" in the war against terrorism. General Bajwa, however, told General Nicholson that Pakistan would continue to contribute positively despite these provocations. The two sides also agreed on the need for continuous engagement and coordination for regional peace. Meanwhile, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford said, "We cannot be successful in Afghanistan unless we have a higher degree of cooperation from Pakistan." He was speaking at the Aspen Security Forum in California on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017. According to the State Department, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson has called for a dialogue between the Taliban and the Afghan government.*

- According to *Dawn*, on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Hamdullah Mohib, Afghanistan's Ambassador to Washington, urged the international community to stop supporting Pakistan.

*He also accused Pakistan of "moving toward becoming a state that supports terrorism as an element of foreign policy, to a state that believes in terrorism." Ambassador Mohib was speaking at a seminar on Afghanistan at the Aspen Institute in California. He also alleged that the new officers in the Pakistani military believed in terrorism as an ideology. However, Robin Raphel, former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, rejected the Afghan Ambassador's claims and deemed them "misleading."*

- According to the Pentagon, on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2017, the US withheld \$50 million in military reimbursements to Pakistan for fiscal year 2016 after US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis told Congress that Pakistan had not taken sufficient action against the Haqqani network.

*This is the second time these funds have been withheld from Pakistan. In 2016, the Pentagon withheld \$300 million in reimbursements. The decision came as the Trump Administration seeks*

*to toughen its policy toward Pakistan for countering the Haqqani network. Moreover, Dawn reported on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017, that Senator John McCain, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has moved a legislative amendment in the US Senate which calls for “imposing graduated diplomatic, military and economic costs on Pakistan as long as it continues to provide support and sanctuary to terrorist and insurgent groups, including the Taliban and the Haqqani network”.*

- According to Pakistan’s Foreign Office, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the first session of the Pakistan-Iran Higher Border Commission was held in Tehran between 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> 2017.

*The Foreign Office said the two sides agreed to bolster cooperation to “effectively” address multiple challenges, including countering criminal networks. Both sides also agreed to cooperate to prevent border violations. In recent months, both Pakistan and Iran have experienced great challenges in border management. In April 2016, 10 Iranian border guards were killed in Sistan-Balochistan after a terrorist attack by militant group Jaish-ul-Adl. Following the attack, the Iranian Foreign Ministry alleged that Pakistan was accountable for the attacks due to the presence of “vicious groups on its soil.”*

- On 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Pakistan’s Foreign Affairs Adviser, Sartaj Aziz, said that the terms of reference (ToRs) of the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT) have not yet been finalised. His remarks came during a discussion in the Senate regarding IMAFT and its impact on Pakistan.

*He informed the Senate that the meeting of the Defence Ministers of the relevant countries has not been held for consultations. Pakistan maintains that its participation in the alliance would be decided by the government in consultation with the parliament once its terms of reference are finalised.*

- Citing a report adopted by the Council of the European Union (CEU), Dawn reported, on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, that the European Union (EU) has a “clear interest in a stable, secure and democratic Pakistan”, and considers the country an important partner in strengthening multilateral cooperation, especially within the United Nations.

*The Council also called on Pakistan to intensify efforts to ensure that its territory is not being used by terrorists and encouraged Pakistan to uphold the highest standards of nuclear safety and security. It urged the country to ratify the relevant non-proliferation and confidence-building treaties such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).*

- On 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Qatar’s Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani visited Islamabad and held talks with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the current tensions in the Middle East.

*Both sides discussed bilateral relations and means to enhance them in addition to a range of topics of mutual interest. Qatar's Foreign Minister also briefed the Pakistani Prime Minister on the developments in the Gulf crisis and all the illegal measures being taken against the State of Qatar.*

## **Pakistan Internal**

- On 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the Supreme Court of Pakistan disqualified Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from his post after declaring him 'not honest' under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution on the primary ground that he had not declared his income from a UAE-based company, Capital FZE Jebel Ali, in his nomination papers filed for the General Elections in 2013.

*The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) also de-notified Nawaz Sharif as a member of the National Assembly. The Supreme Court ordered the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to file a number of corruption references against Nawaz Sharif and three of his children within six weeks. The top court also referred Ishaq Dar, the Finance Minister, to the corruption court. The development follows a unanimous verdict by a five-judge panel that was formed by the Supreme Court in January 2017, for hearing the Panama Papers scandal involving corruption allegations against Nawaz Sharif and his family members. On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017, the Supreme Court of Pakistan formed the six-member Joint Investigation Team (JIT), headed by a senior officer of the Federal Investigation Agency, to probe the Panama Papers scandal. On 10<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the JIT completed its investigation against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his family and submitted its report to the Supreme Court. In its report, the JIT recommended that a case be filed against PM Sharif in the National Accountability Court after finding "glaring disparities" between the Premier's known sources of income and his actual wealth. The JIT also accused Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz of presenting fake documents to the probe team. Following Sharif's ouster, the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad said that the two countries ties would remain unaffected by political developments in Pakistan, while the US expressed hopes for a smooth transfer of power in Pakistan.*

- On 29<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Indian Occupied Kashmir's (IOK) Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti, warned that her government would not allow any move to close cross-LoC trade and the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad road link.

*Chief Minister Mufti also said that she would continue to work towards opening more routes across the LoC with AJK. She also called for the nomination of individuals from AJK to the state's legislature and joint sittings of the Assembly "in this Kashmir and that Kashmir". Further, she criticised the arrest of leaders and activists of the Hurriyat Conference stating: "You cannot imprison an idea, you cannot kill an idea."*

- On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2017, at least 26 people, including nine policemen, were killed in a suicide explosion near the Ferozepur area of Lahore.

*The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack. Media reports said the Taliban Special Group (TSG), which has well-trained suicide bombers, is responsible for the attack. The bombing occurred hours after the Afghan Taliban attacked a bus carrying government employees in Kabul which killed 35 people. Following the attacks, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa held a meeting at the Corps Headquarters in Lahore and stated that both Pakistan and Afghanistan will continue to suffer from terrorism if militants continue using Afghan soil with "impunity." He also offered to help Afghanistan in eliminating terrorist safe havens along their border areas. Pakistani officials have recently mounted pressure on the Afghan government to eliminate terrorist camps, particularly in its Nangahar province from where Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) has launched multiple terrorist attacks in Pakistan.*

- On 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the ISPR stated that a suicide bomber riding a motorcycle hit a Frontier Corps (FC) vehicle killing an Army Major in Peshawar.

*The attack came a day after Pakistan's military announced the launch of Operation Khyber-IV in Khyber Agency to counter the infiltration of Daesh militants from Afghanistan.*

- On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2017, DG ISPR, Major General Asif Ghafoor, announced a military operation in Khyber Agency's Rajgal Valley to "forestall entry" of the Daesh militant group from Afghanistan.

*Major General Ghafoor asserted: "It is the most difficult area in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas." The development follows a statement by the Afghan Defence Ministry's spokesman, Dawlat Waziri, that Pakistan had not carried out any coordination while launching the military operation in the area despite an understanding with regard to coordinated operations on both sides of the Durand Line. Dawlat Waziri also claimed the operations should be monitored by China and the US. The Pakistan Army stated that the Afghan government's objection over its operation against the militants was "unwarranted" and that information about the operation had been shared with Afghan forces and NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan.*

## **India**

- On 20<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Ram Nath Kovind was elected as the 14<sup>th</sup> President of India.

*Kovind is the second Dalit to become Indian president after K. R. Narayan. He was nominated by the ruling BJP in a move analysts claim would help Prime Minister Modi gain political support among India's Dalit community ahead of the 2019 elections.*

- *Express Tribune* reported, on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017, that an Indian Muslim man was brutally lynched by 11 people armed with swords and sticks in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

*In recent years, India has witnessed a marked increase in religiously-motivated murders. The development has prompted a reaction from Pakistan's Foreign Office, which warned that the oppression of non-Hindus in India was on the rise.*

- On 20<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Indian Minister for External Affairs, Shushma Swaraj, briefed the Upper House of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) on the Sikkim standoff, stating: "All countries, including Bhutan, are with us".

*Elaborating on the Sikkim standoff, Swaraj affirmed that whilst China demands that India withdraw its troops, "it's only fair that China too should do the same." She deemed any unilateral action to be unacceptable to India. In response to threats by China, she reiterated that India was well prepared to face any circumstances.*

## **Afghanistan**

- On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2017, at least 35 people were killed following a suicide attack targeting a bus carrying government staff in Kabul.
- In a related development, on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, at least 26 Afghan soldiers were killed in a Taliban attack on a military base in Afghanistan's Kandahar province.

*The Afghan Taliban claimed responsibility for both the attacks, the latest in a series of attacks in Kabul in recent months. The Afghan crisis has deepened as the militants continue to intensify attacks in Afghanistan killing scores of civilians and Afghan troops.*

- On 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, US President Donald Trump asked US service members to come up with new ideas on the Afghanistan conflict.

*President Trump said that he wants, "to find out why we've been there for 17 years." The remarks come at a time when the Trump Administration is exploring a new strategy in tackling the ongoing war in Afghanistan. Citing a senior Trump Administration official, CNN reported, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017, that the new US approach to Pakistan could include cutting US assistance to Pakistan and strengthening a security relationship with India. The US alleges that Pakistan is*

*supporting a number of terror groups, which are operating inside the country. Pakistan rejects these allegations and insists “its counterterrorism operations have been indiscriminate.”*

*---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer*

## UNITED NATIONS

- On July 26, Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, warned that clashes between Palestinian protestors and Israeli forces around the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem presented the risk that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could become a religious one that could ultimately engulf the entire region.

*While stressing the need for all parties to show restraint, Mladenov said these clashes “demonstrated the grave risk of dangerous escalation.” He was briefing the UNSC on latest clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli forces over new security measures at an ultra-sensitive Jerusalem holy site Al-Quds (Al-Aqsa Mosque) where police restricted access to Muslims. The latest incident has taken place against the backdrop of Israel’s continued advancements in settlement construction in East Jerusalem. Mladenov said, “I must once again emphasise that settlement activity in occupied territory is illegal under international law and undermines the chances for the establishment of a viable, contiguous, sovereign Palestinian state as part of a two-state solution.” He urged the Palestinian leaders to avoid provocative statements and Israel to fulfil the responsibility to uphold its obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law.*

- On July 25, Yanghee Lee, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, criticised the reported killings and torture in Myanmar as an “ongoing humanitarian crisis” for the Rohingya Muslim people and other minorities.

*Lee accused the authorities of presiding over a worsening human rights situation in Myanmar. She said that she had catalogued a list of concerns during her 12-day visit to the country, at the invitation of the government. She said, “Myanmar should not expect to have its close scrutiny removed or its special monitoring mechanisms dismantled overnight. This cannot happen until there is real and discernible progress on human rights.”*

- On July 21, the UN blamed the Saudi-led coalition for the July 18, 2017, deadly air strike on civilians in Yemen.

*The UN human rights office said that the strikes hit three families who were staying in a makeshift straw house after being displaced from their homes three months ago. According to the UN, the attack on Mawza district of the south-western province of Taiz killed at least 20 people, including four children. The UN human rights office said, “There do not appear to have been any military objectives anywhere in the immediate vicinity of the destroyed house.” The UN said that it would launch a comprehensive and impartial investigation into the latest incident. The conflict in Yemen has escalated since March 2015, when the Saudi-led forces launched a military operation against the rebels.*

- On July 18, the United Nations said that civilian deaths in Afghanistan had reached their worst level since the beginning of the conflict in the country.

*According to a report by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 1,662 civilians were killed and more than 3,500 injured in the capital Kabul during the first half of 2017, accounting for nearly 20% of the toll. These figures demonstrate a 15% increase in the number of civilian casualties recorded during the same period in 2016. The report also noted that a majority of the victims were killed by anti-government forces, including the resurgent Taliban and Daesh. The UN's special envoy to Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto said, "The continued use of indiscriminate, disproportionate and illegal improvised explosive devices is particularly appalling and must immediately stop."*

*Moiz Khan*