

September 1 – September 15

AREA BRIEF

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**STRATEGIC STUDIES
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CONTENTS

Foreword (General Observations).....	3
Americas.....	6
Arms Control and Disarmament.....	12
China and East Asia.....	17
Europe.....	19
Middle East & West Asia.....	24
South Asia.....	30
United Nations.....	35

Area Briefs: 1-15 September 2017

General Observations

Pakistan

- Pakistan has been seeking to reformulate its policy towards the US in the wake of the Trump policy statement on Afghanistan and the region in August. PM Abbasi, in an 11 September interview, declared that it would be damaging for the US to cut military assistance to Pakistan especially in the counter terrorism war. However, there is still confusion about what concrete measures to take to send a clear message to the US that “enough is enough” and it is the turn of the US and its allies to “do more”.
- Meanwhile, on 7 September, the New York State Department of Financial Services targeted Pakistan’s Habib Bank in New York by imposing a \$ 225m fine.
- On the security front, the US moved to a more militarist approach in Afghanistan and Pakistan and a wave of drone attacks began on Pakistan. 15 September saw the first drone attack, this time on Kurran Agency in FATA, since Trump’s August speech. Earlier, in the wake of a drone attack in June this year, on Hangu, Pakistan’s COAS General Bajwa had issued a warning that such actions negatively impacted the ongoing cooperation between Pakistan and the US militaries. However, there were no statements from either the civilian or the military leadership in the aftermath of the 15 September drone attack.
- The US itself seems confused over its Afghan policy. On the one hand it is using Pakistan as a whipping boy for its own Afghan failures and on the other hand it is seeking cooperation with Pakistan to combat Daesh in Afghanistan. On 14 September, a tripartite meeting was held in Kabul between Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US to jointly evolve a strategy to combat Daesh in Afghanistan. The three sides acknowledged that this could only succeed if there was intelligence sharing and coordinated efforts.
- Another interesting development was US Congressman Brad Sherman informing a House subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 9 September, that the US should pressure Afghanistan, through aid conditionality, into recognizing the Durand Line as the international border with Pakistan.

- The Jhadav case has resumed at the ICJ but little is known of Pakistan’s strategy on how it intends to proceed. With attention in the country focused on domestic political issues, there is little focus on this critical security issue.

International

- India’s weapons development and testing continues at a fast pace. On 15 September, it successfully conducted the last of the developmental trials of its beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) Astra in the Bay of Bengal.
- US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Alice Wells stated that India’s interests in Afghanistan were as “real and legitimate as Pakistan’s” – an issue that is a major source of friction between the US and Pakistan. The latter sees US attempts to give India a major role in Afghanistan as a source of further destabilisation of the region. However, the US sees India as a strategic regional ally and Wells informed a Congressional panel on 12 September that the US viewed India as a defence and strategic partner and sought a major role for India in the region. Wells also reiterated Washington’s desire to sell nuclear technology to India.
- US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson lashed out at Iran on 14 September saying that it had breached the spirit of the 2015 nuclear deal and the Trump Administration would formulate its Iran policy within the overall dynamics of the Middle East and the “threat” Iran posed in that region.
- While addressing Israeli diplomats in New York, 6 September, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu revealed that Israel had made a breakthrough in relations with Arab states and admitted his country had many levels of cooperation with these states but these could not presently be made public. There is a growing suspicion that Saudi Arabia has developed some backdoor channels with Israel.
- The US Security Council imposed new sanctions on North Korea through a unanimous resolution on 11 September as North Korea continued with its nuclear testing.
- Quoting Russian sources, Iran’s *Press Tv* reported, 7 September, that the US had airlifted Daesh commanders to safety as Syrian government troops advanced in Deir ez-Zor in August 2017. Although the US denied this report, the US has been accused for some time now of acting in collusion with Daesh in Syria.

- London saw another terror attack on its Underground when an IED detonated on a Tube at the Parsons Green station on 15 September.

--- *Dr Shireen M Mazari*

Director General

AMERICAS

Domestic

- On September 14 US President Donald Trump said he is “fairly close” to a bipartisan deal to protect young undocumented migrants known as Dreamers.

According to Trump any agreement would include “massive border security.” The President said funding for his proposed border wall on the US border with Mexico was not part of the pact. Meanwhile Trump’s right-wing supporters are infuriated. Earlier Trump stunned fellow Republicans by making a budget deal with the Democrats.

- According to top US Democrats on September 13, they have agreed to reach a deal with President Donald Trump to protect thousands of young undocumented migrants from deportation.

Democrats Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer said they also agreed to work on a border security package that would exclude Trump’s proposed wall with Mexico. However, the White House denied the wall had been excluded from proposals. On September 4, 2017 Trump had announced his decision to cancel the DACA scheme, giving Congress six months to enact a replacement plan for its recipients. After a dinner meeting at the White House, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said, “We agreed to enshrine the protections of DACA into law quickly, and to work out a package of border security, excluding the wall, that’s acceptable to both sides.”

- On September 7, President Donald Trump supported a suggestion from Chuck Schumer, the Senate’s top Democrat to end congressional battles over the US debt ceiling, a day after he struck a major budget deal with the opposition party.

Trump also discussed the fate of 800,000 so-called Dreamers, young adults brought illegally to the country as children. He honoured a request by Nancy Pelosi, the top House of Representatives Democrat, to publicly reassure the Dreamers they do not face imminent deportation. The Senate voted 80-17 to approve the deal Trump reached with Democrats to raise the federal debt limit and fund the government through Dec. 8. The legislation included \$15.25 billion in aid for areas affected by Hurricane Harvey and other natural disasters.

- According to the *NY Times* on September 3 President Trump is strongly considering a plan to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA.

DACA is an Obama-era programme that shields young undocumented immigrants from

deportation. Trump will give the Congress six months to come up with a potential replacement for the popular initiative. Officials working on the plan said however that Trump could still change his mind, and also that some key details had not yet been worked out. Some important issues include whether or not beneficiaries of the programme would be allowed to renew their protected status during the six-month period. The compromise, which could lead to legislation superseding President Barack Obama's executive order, is intended to address a growing chorus of Republican lawmakers, led by the House speaker, Paul D. Ryan, who have implored the White House to keep some form of the programme. The temporary solution has been the subject of quiet negotiations between Trump's legislative staff and members of Ryan's staff.

- On August 12 protesters at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville covered a statue of former US President Thomas Jefferson in black.

Dozens of people staged the protest and posted a sign reading "TJ is a racist and rapist." The protest comes one month after a far-right rally was held against plans to remove the statue of a Confederate General in a park. Jefferson, one of the US founding fathers, was known for owning slaves. The black tarpaulin cover has since been removed. Around 100 students, faculty and community members participated in the demonstration, demanding a fulfillment of the decision by Charlottesville's authorities in August 2017 to remove Confederate statues.

- According to officials on September 12 some 6.5 million homes in Florida are without power after Hurricane Irma cut a deadly path through the state.

The category four hurricane wreaked havoc on the islands of the Florida Keys and western parts of the state. Irma hit Florida on September 10, 2017 and weakened to a tropical storm before becoming a tropical depression. The storm was downgraded as it moved north towards Atlanta, with maximum sustained winds of 56km/h. Media reports linked at least four deaths to the storm in Florida.

- On September 11, former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon said President Trump's decision to fire FBI Director James Comey was the biggest mistake in "modern political history."

Talking to CBS News Bannon said if James Comey had not been sacked, a special counsel would not have been appointed to probe alleged Russian election meddling. He called the special counsel inquiry a "waste of time" and "a total and complete farce." Bannon was himself dismissed in August 2017.

- On September 11, President Donald Trump presided over his first 9/11 commemoration in office.

Trump and First Lady Melania observed a moment of silence at the White House and later at the Pentagon. “Our values will endure, our people will thrive, our nation will prevail, and the memory of our loved ones will never, ever die,” the President said.

International

- On September 15 Eugene Kaspersky denied that the cyber-security firm he founded is close to the Russian government and insists it poses no danger to its American customers.

Kaspersky termed the US government ban asking agencies to stop using his products an “uncomfortable situation.” The US has said it is concerned that Kaspersky is vulnerable to influence from the Kremlin. The company’s founder said that while he lived in Moscow and his firm co-operated with Russian law enforcement on cyber-security, there were no deeper ties.

- On August 13, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) instructed all government departments to remove security software from the Moscow-based company Kaspersky Lab from their IT systems.

The DHS said it was concerned about ties between company officials and the Russian intelligence services. Kaspersky Lab has denied any ties to the Kremlin. However, the allegations have led to a number of US retailers withdrawing its products from sale. Kaspersky has more than 400 million customers worldwide, but it has never succeeded in becoming a major supplier to the US government.

- According to US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on September 14, the United States must consider the full threat Iran poses to the Middle East when formulating its new policy toward Tehran.

Tillerson also accused Iran of breaching the spirit of the 2015 nuclear deal. The comments came during a visit to Britain to see Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Minister Boris Johnson. The trip was focused on the relief effort after Hurricane Irma, how to respond to North Korea’s nuclear test, and resolving the political deadlock in Libya. Tillerson criticised Iran when asked whether he believed it was meeting the obligations of a 2015 international nuclear agreement designed to curb an Iranian nuclear programme in return for lifting most Western sanctions. He cited the preface of the nuclear deal, which calls on Iran to contribute positively to regional security.

- On August 13, the Trump Administration barred the sale of a US technology firm to a

Chinese-backed company, citing national security risks.

Chinese-backed Canyon Bridge Capital Partners had been seeking approval for a \$1.3bn deal to buy Lattice Semiconductor since November 2016. Both the firms expressed their disappointment at the decision. The US has toughened its stance on business dealings with China in recent years. In August 2016, the US launched a formal review of the country's intellectual property practices, which it argues may force US companies to surrender valuable information. Military leaders and US politicians have also urged the Administration to take a closer look at Chinese investments in the US, particularly in the technology industry.

- During a September 11 interview to *Reuters*, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said it would be counter-productive for the United States to sanction Pakistani officials or further cut military assistance, warning it would hurt both countries' fight against militancy.

US-Pakistan relations have plummeted since President Donald Trump set out a new Afghanistan policy in August 2017 and called Pakistan a fickle ally providing safe haven to "agents of chaos" by harbouring the Afghan Taliban and other militants. The United States has begun conditioning future aid to Pakistan on progress Islamabad makes in tackling the Haqqani network militants who it alleges are Pakistan-based and have helped the Taliban carry out deadly attacks inside Afghanistan. Pakistan denies hosting militant sanctuaries, noting it has borne the brunt of violence in the war on terror, suffering more than 60,000 casualties since 2001. Earlier on September 7, 2017 the New York State Department of Financial Services imposed a fine of \$225m on Pakistan's Habib Bank and ordered it to close its operations in the US after accusing it of financing terror. According to observers the DFS order is an early indication on how Washington- Islamabad relations would develop in the foreseeable future.

- On August 4, Nikki Haley, the US Envoy to the UN urged the Security Council to take the "strongest possible measures" against North Korea after its latest nuclear test.

"The time has come to exhaust all diplomatic means before it is too late," Nikki Haley told an emergency meeting of the Council in New York. The US circulated a draft resolution, for a vote on September 10, 2017. South Korea announced its decision to end a warhead weight limit on its own missiles after talks with the US. President Moon Jae-in reached agreement by phone with his counterpart, Donald Trump. Missiles are currently capped at 500kg.

- According to Los Angeles' Mayor Eric Garcetti on September 2 the "largest (wildfire) in the history" of the city has forced hundreds to evacuate.

Garcetti told reporters that the blaze, which broke out on September 1, 2017 and lit up the hills surrounding the northern suburb of Burbank overnight, had already burned 5,000 acres. More

than 700 homes were evacuated in a north Los Angeles neighbourhood and nearby areas.

- On September 10, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called North Korea's behaviour "reckless", calling for a concerted international response to the country's recent nuclear and missile tests.

Pyongyang carried out its sixth and most powerful nuclear test to date on September 3, 2017. "The behaviour of North Korea is a global threat and requires a global response, and that of course also includes NATO," Stoltenberg said. NATO has not been directly involved in the crisis to date, but speculation has been mounting over whether the Organisation's Article 5 would cover a North Korean offensive on the US Pacific territory of Guam. Stoltenberg declined to clarify NATO's position on the matter and instead stressed the need for a conflict-free resolution to the crisis on the Korean Peninsula. "We are now totally focused on how we can contribute to a peaceful solution of the conflict," he said.

Latin America

- On August 15, Brazil's top anti-corruption prosecutor charged President Michel Temer with obstruction of justice and racketeering.

It is the second set of criminal charges against Temer and is based on the plea-bargain testimony of the owners of the meatpacker JBS. They accused Temer of taking bribes and of conspiring to buy the silence of a witness. Temer has strongly rejected all allegations of wrongdoing. The earlier corruption charge was blocked by Congress, which has the power to decide whether the president should stand trial.

- According to the *BBC* on September 14, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has devised a "rabbit plan" to counter "the economic war" being waged against his government by "imperialist forces."

The President urged Venezuelans to breed rabbits and eat them as a source of animal protein. Venezuela is facing record levels of child malnutrition amid persistent food shortages. An opposition politician called the plan "a bad joke." President Maduro revealed the idea on state television, saying that "for animal protein, which is such an important issue, a 'rabbit plan' had been approved.

- On September 5, Central American countries including Mexico said they would lobby US lawmakers to protect young illegal immigrants after US President Donald Trump said he would end the DACA programme that protects them from deportation.

Trump announced plans to halt the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme that has protected from deportation nearly 800,000 young men and women who entered the United States illegally as children. Mexico's Deputy Foreign Minister, Carlos Sada, said Trump's decision created "anxiety, anguish and fear" for the roughly 625,000 Mexican nationals protected under the programme. "They are exceptional. ... This is as emotional for the United States as for Mexico," Sada said at a news conference immediately following the announcement to end the programme.

--- Amina Afzal

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- According to *The Times of India* on September 15, India successfully conducted the final developmental trials of its indigenously developed beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) Astra in the Bay of Bengal.

India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said the trials were carried out during September 11 to 14, 2017. DRDO mentioned that the missile was test-fired from a Su-30 fighter aircraft against Pilotless Target Aircrafts (PTA). India's Defence Ministry said, "All the sub-systems including the indigenous RF Seeker performed accurately, meeting all the mission parameters and objectives. Two missiles were also launched in the combat configuration with warhead and the targets were neutralised." Astra is a single-stage, solid-propellant missile that can hit a target at a range of 75 kilometres with a speed of more than four times the speed of sound at Mach 4.5. This is the first in the series of at least eight trials before it is approved for induction into service by the end of 2017. In a related development, India successfully test-fired its indigenous Nag anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) against two different targets at firing ranges in Rajasthan on September 9, 2017. DRDO said, "The ATGM Nag has successfully hit both the targets under different ranges and conditions with very high accuracy as desired by the armed forces." The latest flight tests have completed the development trials of the Nag missile, which is expected to be inducted soon, DRDO added.

- On September 15, North Korea test-fired a ballistic missile that flew over Japan before landing in the Pacific Ocean.

Yoshihide Sug, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary said the projectile was launched from the Sunan district of Pyongyang and flew over the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. According to South Korea's Defence Ministry, the missile travelled about 3,700 kilometres while reaching a maximum height of 770 kilometres. The Ministry also indicated that the missile flew higher and further than the previous North Korean missile, Hwasong-12 or KN-17, that was also fired over Japan on August 29, 2017. The distance it flew was slightly greater than between the North Korean capital and the US air base in Guam. However, it remains unclear which type of missile North Korea had launched. Observers say it could be an intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM). However, Japanese officials believe that it can be an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said his country would "never tolerate" such "dangerous provocative action." While condemning the North's launch, South Korea's military conducted a ballistic missile drill in response.

- On September 14, South Korean President Moon Jae-in dismissed the possibility of deploying nuclear weapons in South Korea and warned that such an act would lead to a nuclear arms race in northeast Asia.

During an interview with CNN, Moon said, "I do not agree that South Korea needs to develop its own nuclear weapons or relocate tactical nuclear weapons in the face of North Korea's nuclear

threat.” His comments came days after US Senator John McCain’s statement on September 10, 2017, saying that the suggestions from South Korean Defence Minister regarding redeployment of nuclear weapons in the country should be seriously considered. According to a recent Gallup poll in South Korea, 60% respondents were in favour of having nuclear weapons while 35% of the respondents remain opposed to the idea. Though Moon is opposed to the redeployment of nuclear weapons in South Korea, he said the country “needs to develop its military capabilities in the face of North Korea’s nuclear advancement.”

- According to BBC on September 12, Turkey signed a deal with Russia to buy S-400 missile defence systems, its first major weapons purchase from Russia.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, “Signatures have been made for the purchase of S-400s from Russia. A deposit has also been paid as far as I know.” The accord between the two countries was also confirmed by Vladimir Kozhin, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s adviser for military and technical cooperation, saying, “The contract has been signed and is being prepared for implementation.” The purchase of the missile defence systems from a non-NATO supplier is likely to raise concerns in the West over their technical compatibility with the alliance’s equipment. While replying to a journalist on Western concerns regarding the deal, Erdogan said, “We make the decisions about our own independence ourselves, we are obliged to take safety and security measures in order to defend our country.” It remains unclear when the delivery of the system would be made to Turkey since there is a high domestic demand for the S-400s from its own armed forces and also its key clients including China and India.

- On September 11, Yukiya Amano, Head of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said Iran was implementing its nuclear-related commitments undertaken by the country under the July 2015 Nuclear Agreement with world powers.

While denouncing the US criticism of the Iran nuclear agreement, the IAEA insisted that its inspections were the world’s toughest measures and maintained that Iran was sticking to the accord. Amano said, “The verification regime in Iran is the most robust regime. We have increased the inspection days in Iran and the number of inspectors.” Amano’s comments came weeks after US Ambassador Nikki Haley’s visit to the IAEA on August 23, 2017, where she criticised the nuclear agreement and said that the IAEA was not able to carry out “anytime, anywhere” inspections. According to IAEA, however, the Agency has conducted at least 400 inspections of sites in Iran and 25 so-called complimentary access visits since the deal came into force in January 2016. These visits fall under the ‘Additional Protocol’ agreement between Iran and the IAEA, which Tehran has been provisionally applying since 2016.

- On September 8, the US State Department approved a more than \$3.8 billion arms deal for Bahrain, which had been held up by the Obama Administration in 2016 due to human rights concerns.

According to the Pentagon, the proposed sales include 19 F-16V jets made by Lockheed Martin, two patrol boats with machine guns, 221 anti-tank missiles made by Raytheon Co and \$1.8 billion worth of upgrades to Bahrain's existing fleet of F-16 jets. In June 2017, US Senator Bob Corker, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had indicated that he would block arms sales to members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including Bahrain, until they resolve their dispute with Qatar. However, the US officials said that the proposed sales were cleared by the Senate Foreign Relations and House Foreign Affairs Committees through the regular 'tiered review process,' despite reservations.

- According to *Dawn* on September 8, SpaceX successfully launched a secret US Air Force space plane.

California aerospace company broadcasted live images showing a Falcon 9 rocket carrying the unmanned X-37B drone lifting off from Nasa's Kennedy Space Centre. It was SpaceX's second mission for the Pentagon in 2017 following a secret satellite launch in May 2017 and the private company's first launch of the X-37B. Previous X-37B launches had been performed by the United Launch Alliance, a joint venture between Lockheed Martin and Boeing.

- On September 7, South Korea deployed the four remaining launchers of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system designed to protect against mounting threats from North Korea.

South Korea's Defence Ministry confirmed the deployment of the launchers on a former golf course near Seongju city some 217 km south of Seoul. Two launchers and a powerful radar are already in place at the site. The deployment came amid clashes between South Korean protesters and police. Some 8,000 South Korean police gathered in the village of Soseong-ri to break up a blockade of around 300 villagers and civic groups opposed to THAAD. During the tussle, some 38 protesters were wounded. The Soseong-ri residents say they do not have a political motive but are against the deployment of THAAD as their lives have been disrupted by the dozens of military helicopters, buses, trucks that travel through the small melon-farming town of 80 residents.

- On September 6, the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Syria said it had gathered an "extensive body of information" showing that the Syrian Air Force was responsible for the sarin gas attack in the Khan Sheikhun area of southern Idlib in the Syrian Arab Republic.

In its fourteenth report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, covering the period between March and July 2017, the COI noted that the Syrian Air Force used sarin in opposition-held Khan Shaykhun on April 4, 2017, killing over 80 people, most of whom were women and children. A fact-finding mission by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had concluded in early July 2017 that sarin gas was used as a chemical weapon in the

attack, while not assigning blame. A joint UN-OPCW panel is currently working to determine whether Syrian government forces were behind the attack.

- According to *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* on September 3, North Korea conducted the successful test of a hydrogen bomb (H-bomb) that can be placed on an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

KCNA said, “The H-bomb test was implemented with the aim to examine and confirm the accuracy and credibility of the power control technology and internal structural design newly introduced into manufacturing H-bomb to be placed at the payload of the ICBM.” North Korea’s Supreme leader Kim Jong Un signed the order for the test as part of efforts to attain the final goal of completing the state nuclear force, laid out at the 7th Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) held in May 2016. According to the US Geological Survey, the test was conducted from North Korea’s Punggye-ri testing site, with a 6.3 magnitude earthquake. Seismic readings from China also placed the explosion at a magnitude of 6.3. Nuclear experts said it was not clear whether North Korea tested an H-bomb or a nuclear fission device. However, the explosion had produced a yield in excess of 100 kilotons TNT equivalent, which is ten times greater than the weapon the US dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945. Hours before the nuclear explosion, KCNA released photos of Kim inspecting what was described as a hydrogen bomb that could be attached to an ICBM. David Albright, a nuclear weapons expert and President of the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), indicated that he was sceptical of North Korea’s claims and said the photos were probably “propaganda.” However, he mentioned that North Korea was making progress in its nuclear programme. Besides South Korea and Japan, US President Donald Trump condemned the test, saying North Korea is “very hostile and dangerous to the US.” Moreover, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously imposed new sanctions on North Korea on September 11, 2017, putting a ban on the country’s textile exports and restricted shipments of its oil products in response to its sixth and largest nuclear test. Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the UN, said, “The tough new measures were a message to Pyongyang that the world will never accept a nuclear-armed North Korea.”

- According to the UN on September 1, a report released at the UN Office at Geneva by the Cluster Munition Coalition on August 31, 2017, revealed that the use of cluster munitions in war-torn Syria and Yemen has caused a large number of civilian casualties.

The report, titled ‘Cluster Munition Monitor 2017,’ identified at least 971 new cluster munitions casualties globally in 2016, with 860 of these only in Syria. The number of casualties in 2016 is more than double the number recorded in 2015, making it the second-highest annual figure since Cluster Munition Monitor reporting began in 2009 – the highest number of casualties was recorded in 2013. Jeff Abramson, coordinator of the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor initiative, said, “The humanitarian devastation caused by cluster munitions is particularly acute in Syria, where use has continued unabated since mid-2012.” According to the report, casualties were recorded in 10 countries in 2016. However, new attacks causing casualties were recorded

only in Syria and Yemen. Abramson said that the only sure way to end this insidious menace “is to have all States embrace and adhere to the international ban on these weapons.” The Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) is an international treaty that addresses the humanitarian consequences caused by cluster munitions. It prohibits all use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions. Since August 2016, Benin and Madagascar have ratified the CCM bringing the total number of States Parties to 102. There are 17 other countries that have signed but not yet ratified the convention.

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA & EAST ASIA

China

- On September 3, the BRICS annual Summit was held in Xiamen, and was attended by the heads of state of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

In the final declaration, President Xi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Brazilian President Michel Temer and South African President Jacob Zuma said they would work together to improve global economic governance to foster “a more just and equitable international order”. The BRICS called for ‘comprehensive reform’ of the UN and the UN Security Council “with a view to making it more representative, effective and efficient,” in order to increase the representation of developing countries and to adequately respond to global challenges. The five leaders also pledged their opposition to protectionism. The leaders of the BRICS also said militant groups were a regional security concern and called for their patrons to be held to account. On the last day of the Summit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chinese President Xi Jinping met on the sidelines for their first bilateral meeting post-Doklam. Commenting on the meeting, the Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar said, “it was a forward-looking conversation” with an emphasis on “peace and tranquillity on border areas.” President Xi Jinping told Prime Minister Narendra Modi that China desires to put its relationship with India on the ‘right track’.

The group called for an immediate end to violence in Afghanistan and expressed concern on the security situation in the region and violence caused by “the Taliban, Daesh, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates including Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, TTP and Hizb ut-Tahrir.” The BRICS statement has not named Islamabad directly, but India and the US accuse the country of harbouring many of the groups cited in the declaration. Indian media said naming these militant groups in the BRICs resolution was an important win for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Administration which at the previous summit called Pakistan the mothership of terrorism. Pakistan reacted by saying, “it shared international concerns” about the terrorism threat in the region and criticised India for the rise of extremist ideologies and persecution of minorities in the country. Meanwhile, on September 6, 2017, China rejected the notion that Pakistan was targeted on the issue of terrorism in any manner saying, “There is no change in Beijing’s stance on Islamabad’s sacrifices in the war against terrorism.”

North Korea

- According to *Reuters* on September 11, US President Donald Trump said that the new UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions on North Korea were just a small step toward what is ultimately needed to rein in Pyongyang over its nuclear and missile programmes.

Trump’s remarks came immediately after the UNSC unanimously adopted a US-drafted resolution to impose new sanctions on Pyongyang banning North Korea’s textile exports and capping fuel supplies after the country conducted its sixth nuclear test. In response to UN

sanctions, North Korea threatened to use nuclear weapons to “sink” Japan and reduce the United States to “ashes and darkness” for supporting a UNSC resolution and sanctions over its latest nuclear test. On September 15, 2017, North Korea also fired a ballistic missile over the Japanese island of Hokkaido. Japanese PM Shinzo Abe warned North Korea that his country would “never tolerate” such “dangerous provocative action”. Pyongyang’s latest test has further heightened tensions in East Asia. During a phone call with British Prime Minister Theresa May earlier on September 5, 2017, US President Donald Trump stressed that “now is not the time to talk to North Korea” and that “all options remain open to defend the United States and its allies”.

Taiwan

- On September 5, Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen named city mayor, William Lai Chin-te as the country’s new premier.

The appointment of William Lai Chin-te as Taiwan’s new premier has raised concerns over the future of China and Taiwan relations, given his tough, pro-independence stance. Beijing consider Taiwan as part of its territory and has said that any Taiwanese move toward a declaration of independence would prompt a military response.

Myanmar

- On September 1, Army Chief’s office said that at least 400 people, most of them Rohingya Muslims, have died in communal violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine State.
- On September 9, 2017, the Rohingya insurgents declared a month-long unilateral ceasefire.
- On September 12, a spokesman for the National League for Democracy (NLD) said that Aung San Suu Kyi will not attend the upcoming UN General Assembly session in New York.

Aung San Suu Kyi is facing mounting international criticism over the systematic killings and displacements of the Rohingya Muslim in the Rakhine State. According to UN sources, around 38,000 Rohingya have crossed into Bangladesh from Myanmar. Meanwhile, Bangladesh’s Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina has urged Myanmar to take back hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees. Myanmar’s army says it is conducting clearance operations against ‘extremist terrorists’ and security forces have been told to protect civilians. However, Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh say a campaign of arson and killings aims to force them out. Beijing has voiced its support for Myanmar’s military crackdown against the Rohingya Muslims.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

EUROPE

- On September 15, France and Germany called for the right to reintroduce border controls within the Schengen zone for four years in the face of the continuing threat of terrorism.

The proposal is backed by Austria, Denmark and Norway. It says that in “exceptional circumstances” Schengen members should be able to double the length of time for which they are currently allowed to suspend the zone along their internal borders. “We call on the (European) Commission to submit draft legislation aimed at amending the provisions ... to allow member states to reintroduce internal border controls for periods longer than currently provided for.” Schengen rules allow member states to reintroduce internal border ID checks for up to six months in the event of a “serious threat to public policy or internal security”. This can be extended by additional six-month periods, up to a maximum of two years.

- According to Scotland Yard on September 15, an “improvised explosive device” was detonated on a Tube train in southwest London during rush hour.

Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley said hundreds of detectives, working with MI5, are investigating the blast. Twenty-two people are being treated in hospital, mostly for burn injuries. The blast is being treated as terrorism.

- According to BBC on September 15, Swedish politician Patrik Liljeglod revealed on Facebook that a knife-wielding attacker had raped him because of his political leanings.

Liljeglod is a group leader of the Left Party, in the city of Falun. “I was brutally treated and raped at knifepoint on the pretext that I was a Left (crude insult), that people like us like this, and finally that I was a traitor,” he said. Police have confirmed they are investigating the matter. There have been no arrests so far, and the National Forensic Centre is working on the case. Liljeglod said the attack happened at the end of July and also that he would have preferred to bury what happened so deep that nobody but him would ever know, but that he felt it was his duty to speak out because the attack had been politically motivated.

- On September 13, Spain’s Public Prosecutor summoned more than 700 Catalan Mayors to appear for questioning over their support for a banned independence referendum.
- On September 8, Spain’s constitutional court suspended a referendum law passed by the Catalan parliament to hold a vote on independence in October 2017.

Jose Manuel Maza said that any of the municipal leaders who agreed to help stage the October 2017 vote should be arrested if they fail to appear. Prosecutors also ordered the seizure of ballot

papers and voting materials. Catalonia's vote on breaking away from Spain is deemed illegal and has been suspended by the constitutional court. However, its pro-independence government has said that the referendum, which is planned for October 1, 2017 will go ahead as planned. If the vote is held, prosecutors could charge the council leaders with misuse of public funds.

- According to Chancellor Philip Hammond on September 13, the UK government will aim for a “bespoke” deal with the EU to protect the City of London after Brexit.

Financial services are the UK's most important export to the EU, he said. Hammond warned Brussels would not be allowed to use Brexit to introduce “protectionist” measures designed to target the City. And he said a transitional period after the UK leaves would be “integral” to making a smooth Brexit. The UK is due to leave the EU in March 2019.

- During his annual State of the Union address to the European Parliament on September 13, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said there was a “window of opportunity” to build a stronger, more united union but it “wouldn't stay open forever.”

Juncker said Europe's economy was “bouncing back” and the EU had to move beyond Brexit. He called for the union to embrace reforms and forge new trade deals. According to observers, Juncker's speech was different from recent years as he mentioned Brexit just once during the address and focused instead on a post-Brexit vision for the EU.

- BBC reported on September 13 that British PM Theresa May would travel to Florence to make a speech on Brexit in a bid to break the deadlock in negotiations.

May's speech is scheduled for September 22, 2017 ahead of Brexit negotiations in Brussels. Downing Street said the PM would underline the UK's wish for a “special partnership” with the EU after Brexit. The EU has criticised UK negotiators, claiming progress on the deal has been too slow. Speculation on May's speech began when EU Parliament negotiator Guy Verhofstadt claimed an “important intervention” would be made by the PM. The fourth round of talks will begin on September 25, 2017 after being pushed back by a week. May's official spokesman denied that the timing of the speech had caused the delay.

- According to the BBC on September 13, towns and cities across Russia have been hit by a wave of bomb alerts for four consecutive days.

Dozens of schools, shopping centres, railway stations and public buildings have been evacuated. So far, all of the alerts have proved to be hoaxes and the public has been urged to remain calm. The source of the threats is unclear but one official suggested they had originated outside Russia. On September 12, 2017 the bomb scares spread to Moscow, prompting the evacuation of the luxury

GUM shopping centre near the Kremlin.

- On September 13, Russian diplomats at the closed consulate in San Francisco were formally accused of violating state laws following a fire on September 1, 2017.

The move follows Russia's expulsion of US diplomatic staff amid a row over alleged Russian election interference. Thick black smoke was seen coming from a chimney of the San Francisco consulate on September 1, 2017. According to firefighters "unknown items" were burned at the consulate fire, which Russia said was part of "efforts to conserve the building." Air quality officials in San Francisco say that diplomats have been issued with a Notice of Violation for a rubbish burning incident. Burning rubbish is illegal in the city. A NoV is a formal record of a violation of state law, with offenders liable to penalty fees or in more serious cases, civil or criminal prosecution.

- According to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov on September 12, Russia and the United States remain divided over the Intermediate Nuclear Force Treaty.

The remarks followed two days of consultations with US Under-Secretary of State Thomas Shannon. "The talks were not without debates and clashes of opinion," he said. "In particular, discussions revolved around such issues as the INF treaty and themes that we find ever more worrisome -the emergence of attack weapons in space, where the American side is unequivocally moving."

- On September 12 European countries including France, UK and the Netherlands boosted relief efforts in their Caribbean territories devastated by Hurricane Irma amid criticism over their response.

French President Emmanuel Macron visited the French islands that took the full force of the storm, said a huge "airlift" was bringing more aid. The King of the Netherlands toured the Dutch islands. UK Foreign Minister Boris Johnson is due in the region. Irma killed at least 23 people in the three countries' overseas territories. The victims include 10 dead on the French island of St. Barts and on the French part of St Martin shared with the Netherlands.

- On September 12, Turkey signed a "controversial deal" with Russia to arm its forces with Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missiles.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said a deposit had already been paid. The deal is worth \$2.5 bn. NATO reacted sceptically to the decision, saying the system was not compatible with its equipment. Turkey has been establishing closer links with Russia after its recent souring of ties with the US and Europe. Erdogan's government objects to US military support for the YPG Syrian Kurdish

rebels, who are linked to rebel Kurds in Turkey. The S-400 system has a range of 400km and can shoot down up to 80 targets simultaneously, aiming two missiles at each one.

- On September 12 protests took place across France against changes to the country's labour laws.

According to the Interior Ministry 223,000 protesters attended but the unions claimed the number was higher. Two of the country's biggest unions did not participate indicating they may be willing to compromise. President Emmanuel Macron missed the disturbance at home to assess Hurricane Irma damage in the Caribbean.

- On September 10, German Chancellor Angela Merkel offered German participation in any future nuclear talks with North Korea suggesting that the 2015 agreement with Iran could serve as a model for negotiations.

The Chancellor's remarks reflect growing alarm in Europe about Donald Trump's handling of the nuclear crisis. Trump has issued repeated threats to use military force against North Korea. He is instigating a second one by torpedoing the Iran deal. "If our participation in talks is desired, I will immediately say yes," Merkel told the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung during an interview. She pointed to the example of the agreement sealed in Vienna in July 2015 by Iran, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany describing it as "a long but important time of diplomacy" which had a good end.

- On September 10, Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia's ex-president and one-time regional governor in Ukraine crossed into the country with hundreds of supporters.

Saakashvili, formerly Georgian, then Ukrainian, is now a stateless person, as his former ally, President Petro Poroshenko, removed his Ukrainian citizenship. He is also wanted in Georgia on criminal charges, which he claims are politically motivated.

- On September 7, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said he fears that Russia could use massive military manoeuvres next week as a cover for invasion.

Poroshenko said Russia's Zapad-2017 exercises with Belarus might be "a smokescreen to create new Russian army assault groups to invade Ukrainian territory." 13,000 troops will take part in Zapad, from September 14-20, 2017. Russian-backed rebels have taken over territory in eastern Ukraine. Kiev accuses Russia of supplying regular troops and sophisticated heavy weaponry to the rebels. Moscow denies any direct involvement, while admitting that Russian "volunteers" are helping the rebels.

- On September 6, the European Court of Justice rejected a challenge by Hungary and Slovakia to a migrant relocation deal drawn up in 2015.

The Court overruled their objections to the compulsory fixed-quota scheme. Hungary has not accepted a single asylum seeker under the scheme since it was introduced two years ago. It was an attempt to ease the pressure on frontline countries such as Greece and Italy. Hungary's Foreign Minister said, "The real fight starts now."

- According to the *BBC* on September 5, Azerbaijan's ruling elite operated a secret \$2.8bn slush fund for two years to pay off European politicians and make luxury purchases.

According to reports the money was channeled through four UK-based opaque companies. European politicians who adopted a favourable attitude to the government were among those who received payments. The investigation into the alleged secret fund, nicknamed the Azerbaijani Laundromat, was carried out by a consortium of European newspapers and published by the organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). According to leaked bank records, multiple payments were made to several former members of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, PACE. A German ex-MP and member of the Christian Social Union is amongst the recipients. Another one is the Italian former chair of the centre-right group in PACE.

- On September 4, German Chancellor Angela Merkel emerged the winner during a live TV debate over her rival.

According to observers it is becoming increasingly clear that Martin Schulz is unlikely to take Merkel's place. The Chancellor is not known for her skillful oratory but she appeared relaxed, credible and experienced, effortlessly parrying her opponent's attacks. It was her best debate performance, according to the German news site Spiegel online. She lost the first three debates.

- On September 1, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said it may be time to rethink relations with Turkey, after two more German citizens were detained there.

The German Foreign Ministry said they were arrested in the southern resort of Antalya. Turkey is now holding 12 Germans on "political grounds." Merkel said that, in most cases, the detentions had "no legal basis" and added that her government would "perhaps have to rethink" its policies towards Turkey.

---Amina Afzal

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Egypt

- On September 9, Ismail Haniya, Head of the Palestinian Hamas movement, arrived in Egypt on his first visit to the country since his election.

Hamas controls the Palestinian Gaza Strip and has been seeking to improve relations with neighbouring Egypt in an attempt to convince Cairo to open its border with Gaza. Relations between the two countries remained strained since the Hamas-allied Muslim Brotherhood President, Mohammed Morsi was overthrown in 2013 and replaced by former military leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who accused Hamas of supporting terrorism in Egypt. In 2017, some agreements resulted in a detente between the two countries, with Hamas officials saying Egypt had agreed to open the Rafah crossing in the future.

Iran

- On September 5, Iran thanked Saudi Arabia for its handling of the annual Haj pilgrimage, saying it opened the way for negotiations between the two countries.

The head of Tehran's Haj organisation, Ali Ghazi-Askar said, "We thank Saudi Arabia... for adopting a new approach in dealing with Iranian pilgrims. Right now, after holding a successful Haj, it is a good time for both parties to negotiate to resolve their bilateral issues in other fields." Some 86,000 Iranian pilgrims performed the 2017 Haj. They were unable to attend the 2016 Haj following collapse of talks over security concerns. Iran had been highly critical of Saudi Arabia's organisation efforts in the wake of the 2015 Haj stampede that killed 2,300 people, including hundreds of Iranians.

Iraq

- On September 14, at least 74 people, including Iranians, were killed in attacks by gunmen and a suicide car bombing in the city of Nasiriyah.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attacks. According to security personnel, the attackers were disguised as members of the Hashed al-Shaabi, a mainly Shia paramilitary alliance which has fought alongside the army and police against Daesh in northern Iraq. The targeted area is on a highway which is used by Shia pilgrims to travel to the cities of Najaf and Karbala. The latest Daesh attack is the deadliest in Iraq since pro-government forces drove the group out of Mosul in July 2017.

- At the request of Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi on September 14, the Iraqi Parliament fired the governor of the Kirkuk province, Najm Eddine Karim, who had decided to take part in the Kurdish referendum.
- On September 12, the Iraqi Parliament voted against plans by Kurdish leaders to hold an independence referendum.

Following the vote, Kurdish lawmakers walked out of the Parliament. The non-binding referendum would be held on September 25, 2017. Iran and Turkey are fiercely opposing the referendum, fearing it would incite separatist aspirations among their own sizeable Kurdish minorities. According to observers, the referendum could lead to the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan which gained de facto autonomy in 1991. However, the region won autonomy in 2005 under a constitution which set up a federal republic in Iraq. Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi and other top officials have repeatedly criticised the referendum saying it would violate the country's constitution.

Israel

- During his address to Israeli diplomats at a Jewish New Year gathering on September 6, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu said that the regime has made a “breakthrough” in its ties with Arab countries, claiming “many levels of cooperation” exist that cannot yet be exposed to the public.

According to Netanyahu, the ties have not yet reached a level for the Arab states to acknowledge in public. He said, “What is actually happening with the Arab states has never happened in our history, even when we signed agreements.” Earlier in 2017, Netanyahu had said that Arab countries did not consider Israel their enemy anymore. Most Arab governments, however, have no official diplomatic relations with Israel yet. According to reports, countries including Saudi Arabia, maintain secret relations with Tel Aviv.

Qatar

- On September 8, the Saudi-led bloc hostile to Qatar maintained a tough line even after US President Donald Trump offered to help resolve the crisis.
- Earlier on September 7, Kuwaiti Emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met US President Donald Trump in Washington and held talks regarding Kuwait's mediation efforts in the Qatar crisis.

During a joint press conference with the Emir, President Trump offered his own mediation in the crisis and said, "I would be willing to be the mediator. I would be willing to do so, and I think you'd have a deal worked out very quickly. I think it's something that's going to get solved fairly easily." However, the Saudi-led bloc showed no signs of backing down as it questioned the Kuwaiti Emir's statement that Qatar would be willing to accept their 13 demands. A joint statement issued by the Saudi-led bloc said, "Dialogue on the implementation of the demands should not be preceded by any conditions." The bloc also voiced 'regret' over the Kuwaiti ruler's statement 'on the success of mediation in stopping military intervention.' Instead, the four Arab states stressed that 'the military option has not been and will not be considered' under any circumstances.

Saudi Arabia

- On September 13, Saudi Arabia said it would back a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council seeking an independent, international investigation of rights violations and crimes in Yemen.

The Council's three-week session began on September 11, 2017. The Yemen crisis remains one of the key issues of debate. Saudi Arabia and Arab allies had thwarted past efforts at the Council to create an international investigation. Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Geneva, Abdulaziz al-Wasil said, "We have no objection to the inquiry itself, we just have a discussion about the timing. Whether this is the right time to establish an international commission with the difficulties on the ground, and we knew in advance that they will face tremendous obstacles in terms of access." He also said that the Kingdom would seek 'compromise', but suggested the inquiry should be conducted by Yemenis. Meanwhile, the Netherlands, which failed in its efforts to establish an international probe at past Council sessions, also renewed its efforts with support from Canada. The countries laid out their draft resolution seeking the creation of a three-person international commission of inquiry.

- During his visit to Saudi Arabia on September 10, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov urged Arab countries and Qatar to enter into direct talks to solve the diplomatic crisis and restore regional unity.

During a press conference in Jeddah, Lavrov said, "We have confirmed our position that we are in favour of settling the disagreements by means of negotiations, by directly expressing concerns and achieving solutions which would take into account the concerns and the interests of all parties. We are interested in all those mediatory efforts that are currently being made producing results and the unity of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) being restored." Kuwait and the US have been mediating to reach a breakthrough in the Qatar crisis. Meanwhile, Saudi Foreign Minister, Adel al-Jubeir said that Qatar needed to show seriousness in finding a solution to the

crisis. He said, "We want clarity in the Qatari position, we want seriousness in finding a solution to this crisis that leads to the implementation of principles which all countries support: no supporting terrorism, no welcoming unwanted guests, no spreading hate, no intervention in others' affairs." The two ministers also discussed planned de-escalation zones in Syria and unification of the Syrian opposition.

Syria

- During the sixth round of the Syria talks on September 15 in Astana, Russia, Iran, and Turkey agreed on the details of a "de-escalation zone" in Syria's Idlib province.

According to a joint statement, the three countries have agreed "to allocate" their forces to patrol the zone covering Idlib province and parts of the neighbouring Latakia, Hama and Aleppo regions. The statement from the Turkish Foreign Ministry said, "Observers from these three countries will be deployed at check and observation points in safe zones that form the borders of the de-escalation zone. The main mission of these observers has been defined as the prevention of clashes between the government and the opposition forces and any violations of the truce." The joint statement also said, "Under no circumstances the creation of the above-mentioned de-escalation areas undermine the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic." According to Russian negotiator, Alexander Lavrentyev, Iran and Turkey would each send about 500 observers to Idlib, and the Russians will be military policemen. Idlib province borders Turkey and is under the control of al-Nusra Front. The agreement on the creation of the four zones was reached in May 2017 and has been one of the substantive results of the Syria talks.

- According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, on September 12, separate Russian and US-led coalition air strikes killed 35 civilians in Syria's Deir ez-Zor province.
- On September 10, at least 34 civilians, including 9 children, were killed in Russian air strikes on ferries fleeing violence in the province of Deir ez-Zor.

According to the Observatory, the raids targeted more than 40 ferries that had left Al-Boulil town southeast of Deir ez-Zor city for the eastern shore of the river. The province lies along Syria's border with Iraq and is of strategic importance for both the Russian-backed Syrian regime and an alliance of Kurdish and Arab forces supported by the US-led coalition fighting Daesh. Syrian government troops are fighting to the west of the Euphrates River that passes diagonally across the province. The Syrian Democratic Forces are battling Daesh east of the river. More than 330,000 people have been killed in Syria since the start of the conflict in March 2011.

- On September 7, Israel conducted air strikes on a military site in Syria's Hama province.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the attack was on a facility of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre, an agency which the US describes as Syria's chemical weapons manufacturer. The strikes also hit a military camp next to the centre that was used to store ground-to-ground rockets and where Iranian personnel and its ally, the Lebanese Hezbollah group, had been seen more than once. An Israeli army spokeswoman declined to discuss air strikes on Syria. Following the strikes, Syria's Foreign and Expatriates Ministry wrote a letter to the UN Secretary General and the Chairman of the Security Council where the Syrian government urged the UN to denounce Israel's repeated aggression against the country and take prompt action to stop the attacks before they further undermine the ongoing fight against terrorist groups.

- Citing Russia's Sputnik news agency, Press Tv reported on September 7 that US aircraft have evacuated 22 Daesh field commanders in Deir ez-Zor as government forces are advancing against the group.

According to Sputnik, the terrorists were taken to "safer regions" in the face of "successful actions by Syrian government troops in the eastern part of Syria in late August 2017." The first evacuation operation took place on August 26, 2017 during which a "US Air Force helicopter" took two Daesh commanders of "European origin" with members of their families out of Deir ez-Zor. In another operation on August 28, 2017, US helicopters transferred 20 Daesh field commanders and militants close to them from the Syrian city. The US-led coalition rejected the report. The US has long been accused of colluding with Daesh to provide safe passage and logistical support to members of the group in conflict zones.

- On September 5, the Kremlin praised the Syrian Army for breaking a year-long siege by Daesh of Deir ez-Zor city.

According to Kremlin Spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, 'Commander-in-Chief Vladimir Putin congratulated the Russian military command (in Syria) as well as the command of the Syrian government troops with this very important strategic victory over the terrorists.' According to the Russian Defence Ministry, on September 5, 2017, a Russian warship in the Mediterranean fired cruise missiles at Daesh fighters near the town of Al-Shula to aid the Syrian army. Peskov said, "As a result of these strikes there was damage to the infrastructure, underground communications, weapon stockpiles of the terrorists, and this allowed the armed contingents of government forces... to rapidly advance, break through IS defences and unblock the city (of Deir ez-Zor)." President Putin also sent a telegram to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad praising the victory. The Syrian Army and allied fighters, backed by Russian air support, have been advancing towards Deir ez-Zor on several fronts in the past few weeks. The advance has opened a land route linking that territory to the outside. The advance into the strategic city of Deir ez-

Zor is a significant victory for President Bashar al-Assad against Daesh and a strong blow to the group.

- On September 4, at least 14 civilians were killed in US-led airstrikes on Raqqah.

According to Syria's official news agency, SANA, US warplanes carried out raids on the city's al-Naim region claiming that they were targeting members of the Daesh terrorist group. The raids also resulted in severe damage to civilians as well as the city's infrastructure. In August 2017, Amnesty International released a report confirming that US operations in Raqqah were greatly endangering civilians. The coalition has been conducting airstrikes against Daesh targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorisation from the Damascus government or a UN mandate. The coalition has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It also remains incapable of fulfilling its declared aim of destroying Daesh.

Turkey

- On September 14, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani held talks with Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara.

It was Sheikh Tamim's first visit abroad since the beginning of a diplomatic crisis with Saudi Arabia. Turkey is a strong ally of Qatar and President Erdogan has been a major supporter of Doha in the crisis that diplomatically and economically isolated Qatar. He has spoken out strongly against the sanctions by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt against Doha. In a show of solidarity, Turkey also sent cargo ships and hundreds of planes carrying food to break the embargo. In July 2017, Erdogan made a regional tour of the Gulf countries, with visits to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar in an attempt to defuse the crisis. However, his visit ended without any sign of a breakthrough and Ankara has shown signs of preferring to leave mediation efforts to Kuwait.

---Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA

Pakistan External

- On September 15, a US drone killed three suspected militants in an attack on a compound in Kurram Agency.

This is the first US drone strike inside Pakistan since President Donald Trump outlined his new Afghan strategy and accused Islamabad of harbouring terrorists. The development could further raise tensions between Islamabad and Washington. In June, 2017, after a US drone strike in Hangu, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa warned the US that such actions are against the ongoing cooperation.

- On September 15, Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson, Nafees Zakaria said that Pakistan has received the written pleadings submitted before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by India in the case of Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav.

Earlier on September 13, 2017, India's External Affairs Ministry said the country had submitted its written pleadings to the ICJ in the Jadhav case. Pakistan will submit its counter-memorial to the ICJ on December 13, 2017.

- During a tripartite meeting in Kabul on September 14, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US resolved to eliminate the Daesh militant group from the region.

All three sides asserted that it can only be achieved through exchange of intelligence, complementary efforts and enhanced cooperation. The Pakistani side was represented by Pakistan Army's DGMO, Major General Sahir Shamshad Mirza.

- On September 12, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said that Pakistan is, "open for joint patrolling," and "joint posts" along its border with Afghanistan.

The Premier noted that Pakistan will fence the border with Afghanistan and said that Afghans could do the same on their side of the border. He rejected allegations about terrorists' sanctuaries inside Pakistan and claimed that all "criminal elements are based in Afghanistan."

- On September 12, the Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan, Omer Zakhilwal asked Islamabad to maintain a "good brotherly relationship" with Afghanistan. He also urged Pakistan not to object to the growing ties between Kabul and Delhi as these would not "inflict harm" upon Islamabad.

He said Pakistan and Afghanistan must respect each other's sovereignty and move ahead to narrow down their differences to build long-lasting trust. Zakhilwal's comments came during a round table discussion on "Bilateral Reconciliation: Opportunities and Challenges", organised by the Regional Peace Institute in Islamabad.

- On September 11, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif visited Tehran and met with Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif. During the

visit, both countries, “agreed that there was no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan and a politically negotiated settlement was imperative for lasting peace in Afghanistan.”

- In a related development on September 8, Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif visited Beijing and held talks with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. The two countries agreed to work together for defence and regional security and agreed that the Afghan problem could only be resolved politically as there is no military solution to the conflict.

The visits are part of Pakistan’s effort for ‘political consultations’ on Afghanistan after US President Trump announced his new regional policy focusing only on military operations in Afghanistan to counter the Taliban insurgency rather than seeking a negotiated outcome. After Tehran, Asif visited Turkey on September 12, 2017 and met the Turkish leadership including President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The two countries resolved to work together for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

- According to *Dawn* on September 9, US lawmaker, Brad Sherman told a House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs that the US needs to condition its aid to Afghanistan on the recognition of the Durand Line as Kabul’s refusal to recognise it unsettles Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Alice Wells reminded Pakistan that India’s interests in Afghanistan were as “real and legitimate as Pakistan’s”. Pakistan cites India’s growing involvement in Afghanistan as a primary cause of regional instability and accuses India of supporting anti-Pakistan militant groups, who use Afghan territory to launch attacks inside Pakistan.

- On September 9, Pakistan and Kazakhstan agreed to implement joint projects in the fields of defence, energy and communication to strengthen bilateral cooperation. The agreement was signed during a meeting between President Mamnoon Hussain and Kazakh Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev in Astana.

President Mamnoon visited Astana to attend the first summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on science and technology. During his visit, the President also met his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan and both leaders stressed that the Afghan issue could not be resolved “without Pakistan,” and called for “recognition of the country’s efforts for peace and against terrorism”.

- According to *The Nation* on September 8, the New York State Department of Financial Services (DFS) said it had fined Pakistan’s Habib Bank and its New York branch \$225 million for failures to comply with laws and regulations designed to combat illicit money transactions.

The bank was also ordered to surrender its licence to operate in New York. Earlier in August 2017, the regulator announced that it was seeking to fine HBL up to \$630 million for “grave” compliance failures relating to anti-money laundering and sanctions rules at its only US branch.

The development follows a 2016 review during which DFS said it found “weaknesses in the bank’s risk management and compliance” which bank management had failed to address.

- According to *Dawn* on September 1, the Trump Administration notified Congress that it was putting \$255 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to Pakistan into the equivalent of an escrow account that Islamabad can only access if it does more against terror groups based in the tribal areas and stops cross-border attacks in Afghanistan.

The State Department stressed that the US would allow it to review the level of its cooperation with Islamabad before making new commitments. The FMF provides grants and loans to help countries purchase US weapons and defence equipment and for acquiring defence services and military training in the US.

- According to Pakistan’s Foreign Office on September 9, “The Ambassador of Myanmar, Mr U Win Myint, was called to the Foreign Office by Foreign Secretary, Tehmina Janjua to convey a strong protest of the Government and people of Pakistan at the ongoing violence against the Rohingya Muslims.”

The government of Pakistan also asked Myanmar to “conduct urgent investigations into recent violence against the Rohingya Muslims and hold accountable those involved in these serious crimes”. The Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim group, have suffered decades of oppression under the country’s Buddhist majority.

Pakistan Internal

- On September 13, a civilian was killed when the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) resorted to mortar shelling in villages in Phookaliyaan-Bajwat sector along the Sialkot Working Boundary.
- In a related development on September 11, *Dawn* reported that Indian forces killed two Kashmiri youth and captured one during a brief gun battle.

The killing sparked protests by hundreds of local residents onto the streets in support of the slain youth. According to media reports, at least 140 suspected rebels have been killed in 2017 by Indian troops in the Kashmir valley.

- On September 10, four members of the Shia Hazara community were killed after two unidentified men opened fire on them in Kuchlak in Balochistan.

This is not the first time that the Hazara community has been targeted by militants in Balochistan. Earlier in July, 2017, four Hazara men were killed in Balochistan’s Mastung area.

- On September 8, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi inaugurated the country’s fifth nuclear power plant C-4 at Chashma, Mianwali.

The 340MW Chashma-IV reactor, is the fourth reactor built as part of a collaboration between the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) and China National Nuclear Corporation. Addressing a gathering at the inauguration of the C-4, the Prime Minister said that the government would end power load-shedding in the country by the end of 2017 and would add 10,000MW to the national grid by the end of its term.

India

- According to *Dawn* on September 12, the acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Alice Wells told a congressional panel that Washington sees India as a major defence and strategic partner and wants New Delhi to play a key role in bringing peace and stability to the region.

She also expressed the US desire to sell nuclear components to India. She termed India one of the most important strategic partners for the US. Earlier in June 2017, Lockheed Martin and India's Tata Group reached an agreement to relocate the manufacturing of the F-16 fighter jets to India. The agreement would allow India to produce, operate and export the F-16 Block 70 aircraft. Meanwhile, Pakistan's Foreign Office warned that an arms deals between Washington and New Delhi would destabilise the region.

- According to *India Today* on September 6, Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat said that a two-front war with Pakistan and China could not be ruled out.

*General Rawat also said that there is little hope for reconciliation with Pakistan. He added that nuclear weapons did not take away the threat of war. The Army Chief said that if Indian troops were engaged with China on the northern border of the country, there was a possibility Pakistan would try to "take advantage of the situation". Following General Rawat's comments, the Chinese state run *Global Times*, in its editorial titled "Rawat's arrogance taints India's image", said that the timing of his comments, coming as they did after "positive signals about bilateral ties" at BRICS meet, "sent the completely opposite message" about India-China relations. The editorial further hinted that India wouldn't be able to handle both China and Pakistan as its adversaries at the same time. However, in a departure from his earlier statement, Indian Army Chief said during an event in Dehradun on September 9, 2017, "neither China nor Pakistan is an imminent threat to the country".*

- On September 5, Gauri Lankesh, an Indian journalist and activist, was shot dead by unidentified men outside her residence in West Bengaluru.

Gauri Lankesh was known for her strident opposition to Hindu extremism. She was also vocal about growing communal violence in the country.

Afghanistan

- On September 11, Afghanistan urged India to step up the development of the Chabahar port in Iran. The development follows Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, Salahuddin Rabbani's meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi.

Swaraj said that India would speed up the development work and begin supplying wheat to Afghanistan within weeks through Chabahar. The port would allow India to transport goods to Afghanistan by sea and provide access to Central Asia. Pakistan does not allow India to transport through its territory to Afghanistan.

- On September 1, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani expressed readiness for "comprehensive political talks with Pakistan," stressing, "Peace with Pakistan is in our national agenda".

President Ghani also called on the Taliban to accept peace. Pakistan, meanwhile, called for the need for an extensive engagement between the two countries. Relations between Islamabad and Kabul have mostly remained strained as both countries accuse each other of harbouring terrorists.

- Citing the Pentagon Joint Staff Director, Kenneth McKenzie, *Dawn* reported on September 1 that the US troop level in Afghanistan has now reached 11,000, exceeding previously stated 8,400 set under former President Barack Obama.

On August 21, 2017, US President Donald Trump announced an increase in US forces in Afghanistan to assist local forces for conducting counter-terrorism missions and to train and advise Afghan government security forces. In a related development on the same day, US Defence Secretary, James Mattis signed deployment orders for additional American troops to Afghanistan and said that the US troops in Afghanistan would not only train Afghan local Security Forces but have also been authorised to engage the enemy. Secretary Mattis also expressed the desire to work with Pakistan to defeat terrorists.

--- Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

UNITED NATIONS

- On September 13, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called for the Muslims of Rakhine state to be given either nationality or legal status, as he voiced concern about violence that has forced nearly 380,000 people to flee Myanmar.

Acknowledging the grievances of Rohingya Muslims that have become undeniable, Guterres said, “I call on the Myanmar authorities to suspend military action, end the violence, uphold the rule of law, and recognise the right of return of all those who had to leave the country.” He added that it is crucial to give the Muslims of Rakhine state either nationality or, at least for now, a legal status that would allow them to lead normal lives. This would include freedom of movement and access to labour markets, education and health services. While expressing concern about the security, humanitarian and human rights situation in Rakhine, Guterres said that even though he had condemned the attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, the UN was receiving constant reports of violence by Myanmar’s Security Forces, including indiscriminate attacks against Rohingya Muslims. He mentioned that he has written to the UNSC to express his concern and to propose steps to end the violence. On September 5, 2017, UN agencies also appealed for \$18 million in aid for three months for civilians who are moving from Myanmar into Bangladesh. Thousands of people are moving daily to south-eastern Bangladesh, living in makeshift sites and seeking shelter. “We are running out of space in the existing settlements and new arrivals are pitching camp wherever they can erect some plastic sheeting to protect themselves from the elements,” said Sarat Dash, Bangladesh Chief of Mission at International Organisation of Migration.

- On September 11, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, accused Myanmar of waging a “systematic attack” on the Rohingya Muslims and said that “ethnic cleansing” seemed to be under way.

Al Hussein said, “The situation in Myanmar is a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.” He indicated that the current situation cannot be fully assessed since Myanmar has refused access to human rights investigators. Al Hussein called the operation conducted by Myanmar’s Security Forces in Rakhine state as ‘clearly disproportionate.’ The latest security operation in Rakhine state is being conducted in response to attacks by militants against 30 police posts on August 25, 2017. He said, “I call on Myanmar to end its current cruel military operation, with accountability for all violations that have occurred and to reverse the pattern of severe and widespread discrimination against the Rohingya population.”

- During a press conference on September 5, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, called for an independent, international investigation into the allegations of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Yemen.

Al Hussein said, “An international investigation would go a long way in putting on notice the parties to the conflict that the international community is watching and determined to hold to account perpetrators of violations and abuses.” According to a UN report, civilians are suffering deeply the consequences of an “entirely man-made catastrophe.” At least 5,144 civilians have been documented as killed and more than 8,749 injured between March 2015 and August 2015 when the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) began reporting on civilian casualties. Children accounted for 1,184 of those who were killed and 1,592 of those injured. Coalition airstrikes continued to be the leading cause of child casualties as well as overall civilian casualties. Some 3,233 of the civilians killed were reportedly killed by Coalition forces. The report also found that the governorates most affected by the conflict were Aden, Al-Hudaydah, Sana'a and Taizz.

- On September 5, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the announcement made by the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN) of a temporary bilateral cease-fire from October 1, 2017 to January 12, 2018.

While reiterating the UN’s support to all efforts to establish peace in Colombia, Guterres commended the role of the guarantors including Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Norway and Venezuela in support of the negotiations, as well as the important role of the Catholic Church. According to a press release by the UN Mission in Colombia, the UN believes that the main objective of the agreement is to improve the humanitarian situation of the population. The civilian population of Colombia that suffers the conflict directly would be the main beneficiary with the commitments announced by the ELN to suspend all types of kidnappings and attacks against the physical infrastructure.

- On September 1, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said that the United Nations is ready to support ongoing relief efforts in Bangladesh, India and Nepal hit by heavy floods and landslides.

Guterres also extended his condolences to the governments and the people of Bangladesh, India and Nepal and appreciated the respective governments’ leadership in responding to the needs of those affected. He indicated that United Nations humanitarian agencies are working with partners and the respective governments to bring in clean water, food, shelter and medical aid for people affected by flooding and landslides in South Asia.

--- Moiz Khan