

September 16 – September 30

AREA BRIEF

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Area Briefs: 16-30 September 2017

General Observations

Pakistan

- The UN General Assembly (UNGA) session became a diplomatic battleground between Pakistan and India. PM Abbasi, in his address to the UNGA on 22 September raised the issue of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and Indian atrocities being committed there. He called on the UN Security Council to implement its own resolutions on the Kashmir dispute. The Indians responded in their usual mode by accusing Pakistan of indulging in and breeding terrorism. When Pakistan's envoy to the UN, Dr Lodhi gave a strong statement before the UNGA, a new controversy arose over the picture she displayed while talking of the abuse of human rights by Indian security forces against unarmed Kashmiri civilians in IOK including the use of pellet guns. The Indians immediately declared that the picture shown by Dr Lodhi was of a Palestinian girl. This controversy unfortunately diverted from the strong message that Dr Lodhi had conveyed very effectively.

PM Abbasi was unable to have a one-on-one meeting with Donald Trump and had to be satisfied with a meeting with Vice President Pence. Abbasi did have a brief encounter with Trump at the US's UN reception.

- PM Abbasi also addressed think tanks in Washington DC where he showed some confusion over Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons – specifically the Nasr – by saying Pakistan had not “fielded any tactical weapons” and then saying the country had developed tactical weapons in response to India's ColdStart doctrine. The fact is that Nasr is Pakistan's tactical, but not battlefield, weapon that plugs the country's credibility gap in the wake of India's ColdStart doctrine that keeps emerging in different forms even today.
- Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif, in a bid to appease the US, took ownership of the militant groups like Haqqanis and Lashkar-i-Taiba when he spoke before a think tank in the US and stated that “the Haqqanis, Hafiz Saeed and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) are liabilities” for Pakistan which he said did not have “the assets to match these liabilities.” This statement undermined the Pakistan military's war against the terrorists in FATA and aroused overwhelming criticism in Pakistan. The general view in Pakistan was that either he said this deliberately to undermine the Pakistan Army, which is coming in for increasing criticism by the PMLN, or he was not advised properly on what he should and

should not state in his official capacity. Either way, the message was one of appeasement to the US, reaffirming the Trump and General Nicholson attacks on Pakistan.

- After these remarks it was not surprising to hear US Defence Secretary General Mattis and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, state, at a joint press conference in Kabul on 28 September, that “We will watch Pakistan’s choices.” The coming months will aggravate the Pak-US relationship further as the latter finds itself mired deeper in the conflict in Afghanistan.
- Despite these contradictory messages, the one clear message that was conveyed to the US by the Pakistani leadership was that it was unacceptable for the US to lay the blame for its own failures in Afghanistan on Pakistan.
- Pakistan also protested to Switzerland about the use of its territory by the militant Baloch leaders against Pakistan including a “Free Balochistan” advertisement campaign. The Swiss government expressed its inability to take action on this issue and soon Geneva was flooded with advertisements demanding freedom for Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura also appeared in Geneva during the 36th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).
- Meanwhile the waters war between Pakistan and India continues to become more acute. Pakistan has asked the World Bank to establish a court of arbitration to resolve the water dispute with India in the wake of the failure of the latest round of talks, on the Kishanganga and Ratle hydro projects in IOK.
- Indian violations across the LoC and the Working Boundary continued unabated and on 21 September four members of a family were killed along the Working Boundary. On 23 September a girl was killed in Indian firing across the LoC.

International

- In the last week of September US Defence Secretary Mattis undertook a visit to India meeting Indian Defence Secretary Nirmala Sitharam in New Delhi. The US has been seeking a greater Indian role in Afghanistan. Indian Defence Secretary Sitharaman made clear India would not deploy troops in Afghanistan but would be ready to increase its interaction with and training of Indian security forces. This is ominously similar to how the US got involved in Vietnam – beginning with the ending of military “trainers”.

- On 27 September Russia announced it had completed the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpiles a year ahead of the latest extension given to it. On 29 September, the US stated it was still in the process of destroying its stockpiles but would meet its 2023 deadline.
- Former Senator Larry Pressler, on 28 September declared that the 2008 Indo-US nuclear deal was less about civil nuclear cooperation and more in the nature of an arms deal between the two countries.
- Earlier, on 20 September, India declared it was building a nuclear power plant in collaboration with Russia in Bangladesh. This is the first project undertaken under an Indo-Russian agreement to jointly build atomic energy projects in other countries. This announcement was made at the 61st General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna by India's Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Sekhar Basu.
- The Kurdish referendum on independence from Iraq received strong reactions from Iraq's neighbours and the Iraqi government but Kurd officials went ahead with it and the result was announced on 27 September. Apparently the call for independence was approved by over 92% of those who voted. In reaction, on 29 September the Iraqi government cut off the autonomous northern Kurdish region's direct air links with the outside world indefinitely. Turkey also had a strong negative reaction with President Erdogan informing the UNGA that this referendum could lead to a global conflict. As expected, Israel was the only regional country that extended strong support for this referendum and an independent Kurdish state.

--- Dr Shireen M Mazari

Director General

AMERICAS

Domestic

- On September 30 US Health Secretary Tom Price resigned over the use of expensive private planes for official business.

Price previously apologised after making 26 private flights since May 2017 at a cost of \$400,000 to taxpayers. Government officials, except those dealing with national security matters, are required to take commercial flights for work-related travel. Three other members of the Trump Cabinet are under scrutiny for using private planes while working. Trump has accepted Price's resignation and Don J Wright had been designated as acting Health Secretary. Wright is currently Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health.

- On September 30, President Donald Trump lashed out at Puerto Rico's politicians over their criticism of US relief efforts on the island following Hurricane Maria.

The category four hurricane killed 16 people on the island and left millions in need of aid. In a series of tweets, Trump said that Puerto Rican officials showed "poor leadership ability" and "want everything to be done for them."

- Earlier on September 28, Carmen Yulín Cruz, the Mayor of San Juan severely criticised the Trump Administration for its relief effort in the wake of hurricanes Jose and Maria, saying if it doesn't solve the logistics there would be something close to a genocide."

Cruz said, "I cannot fathom the thought that the greatest nation in the world cannot figure out the logistics for a small island of 100 miles by 35 miles. So, mayday we are in trouble." Cruz said, "So, Mr Trump, I am begging you to take charge and save lives. After all, that is one of the founding principles of the United States of ... America. If not, the world will see how we are treated not as second-class citizens but as animals that can be disposed of. Enough is enough." Meanwhile President Trump referred to the territory's debt crisis, saying it would have to work with federal authorities to determine how to pay for a massive recovery effort compounded by "the tremendous amount of existing debt already on the island".

International

- According to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on September 30, the US is in "direct contact" with North Korea.

According to Tillerson, Washington is “probing” the possibility of talks with Pyongyang. “We have lines of communications to Pyongyang,” he said during a trip to China. “We’re not in a dark situation.” North Korea and the US have engaged in heated rhetoric in recent months but it was not previously known they had lines of communication.

- *The Telegraph* reported on September 27 that Russia and the US have agreed to co-operate on a NASA-led project to build the first lunar space station, part of a long-term project to explore deep space and send humans to Mars.

Like the International Space Station, the moon ship would also be open to astronauts and cosmonauts from around the world. Space bosses hope the Deep Space Gateway would allow mankind to stage space flights to Mars and elsewhere in the Solar System.

- On September 25, US President Donald Trump expanded his controversial travel ban to include people from North Korea, Venezuela and Chad.

According to the White House the new, open-ended restrictions follow a review of information sharing by other countries. Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia remain under the travel ban. Sanctions previously placed on Sudan were lifted. In a presidential proclamation, Trump said the countries in the list had “inadequate” security protocols. “I must act to protect the security and interests of the United States and its people,” he said.

- According to the *Guardian* on September 25, the first group of refugees to be resettled under the Australia-United States resettlement deal flew out of Port Moresby.

According to officials a total of 54 refugees from Manus and Nauru have been approved for resettlement “at this time”. The US agreed to take some 1200 refugees from Australia’s offshore detention facilities in a deal negotiated between Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, and former US president Barack Obama. Donald Trump, who called it the worst deal ever, had “begrudgingly upheld” it.

- On September 22 President Trump lashed back at North Korean leader Kim Jong Un calling him a “madman” whose regime would be “tested like never before.”

The latest economic pressures announced on September 21, 2017 come as the Trump Administration seeks to build international support for more aggressively confronting North Korea. Under the new penalties, nations, foreign companies and individuals would have to choose between doing business with the US or North Korea. US officials acknowledge that like other sanctions, these may not deter North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s drive to threaten the US with a nuclear weapon, but are aimed at slowing him down.

- According to *USA Today* on September 22 Russians attempted to hack election systems in 21 states in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election.

The Department of Homeland Security notified states of the attempted breaches. The attempt in Wisconsin remained unsuccessful. According to the Associated Press, states that were targeted included some key political battlegrounds, such as Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin. The others include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas and Washington.

- According to the *NY Times* on September 21, Facebook announced that it was turning over more than 3,000 Russia-linked ads to congressional committees investigating the Kremlin's influence operation during the 2016 presidential campaign.

The company has been under growing pressure from Congress and the public to reveal more about the spread of covert Russian propaganda on Facebook. "I care deeply about the democratic process and protecting its integrity," Facebook's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, said during an appearance on Facebook Live, the company's video service. He added that he did not want anyone "to use our tools to undermine democracy."

- According to CNN on September 19, US investigators wiretapped former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort under secret court orders before and after the election.

Manafort is at the centre of the Russia meddling probe. The government snooping continued into early 2017, including a period when Manafort was known to talk to President Donald Trump. Some of the intelligence collected includes communications that sparked concerns among investigators that Manafort had encouraged the Russians to help with the campaign.

- According to the *NY Times* on September 20 Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said that his country's military forces had uprooted all the sanctuaries used by Islamic extremists along its border with Afghanistan.

"We have regained control of the area," Abbasi said. "There are no sanctuaries anymore. There are none at all. I can categorically state that." According to observers, the Prime Minister's "blanket denial of Pakistan's role as a safe haven could augur a turbulent period in its relations with the United States." Trump's new strategy for Afghanistan depends on Pakistan "playing a more constructive role by depriving militants of the ability to plot and carry out attacks from across the border." Abbasi was confronted with the changing reality of Pak-US relationship. Although

he met with Vice President Mike Pence, he did not get a one-on-one meeting with Trump, instead chatting with him at a reception.

- On September 19 during his first ever address to the UN General Assembly, Donald Trump threatened to totally destroy North Korea.

During his 40-minute long speech Trump criticised nations he believes are against the US, primarily North Korea and Iran. He did not mention climate change however.

- According to the NPR on September 16, two television interviews created greater ambiguity about the Trump Administration's position on the Paris Climate Agreement.

On CBS' Face The Nation, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was asked if there was a chance the U.S could stay in the accord. "I think under the right conditions, the President said he's open to finding those conditions where we can remain engaged with others on what we all agree is still a challenging issue," Tillerson said. In an interview with Fox News, National Security Adviser McMaster called reports that the President was reconsidering his position to pull out of the Paris agreement "false." "The President decided to pull out of the Paris accord because it's a bad deal for the American people and it's a bad deal for the environment," McMaster said.

Latin America

- On September 28, a leader of the FARC rebel group was killed in the Colombian province of Guaviare.

Euclides Mora, was banished from the FARC in December 2016 with four other rebel leaders for not agreeing to the terms of the peace agreement signed by the group. The military said he had been engaging in drug trafficking. He was killed in an air force operation in the jungle.

- According to CNN on September 29, the US State Department is removing families of employees and nonessential personnel from Cuba.

21 US diplomats and family members became ill after suspected sonic attacks. The US Embassy will continue to operate with a 60% reduction in staff. The officials said the US will stop issuing visas in Cuba effective immediately because of the staff reductions and not because of retaliatory measures. The State Department has also issued a travel warning; urging Americans not to travel to Cuba because they could also be at risk as some of the attacks against diplomats have taken place at hotels where Americans stay.

- A powerful earthquake shook Mexico on September 20 killing numerous people and leaving many trapped under collapsed buildings.

Some 300 people died in Mexico City and in the states of Puebla, Mexico and Morelos. The epicenter of the 7.1-magnitude earthquake was 4.5 kilometers east-northeast of San Juan Raboso and 55 km south-southwest of the city of Puebla, in Puebla state.

---Amina Afzal

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On September 29, the US said that it was on track to meet a 2023 deadline for destroying its chemical weapons stockpile.
- On September 27, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Russia completed the task of destroying its last chemical weapons stockpile, three years ahead of schedule.

A Pentagon spokesman said, "The United States remains committed to the complete destruction of its declared chemical weapons. We are on track to meet our self-imposed deadline for complete destruction by the end of 2023." He added, "Over 90% of the United States stockpile has been destroyed." The statement came from the Pentagon after Russia accused the US of not meeting its obligation of destroying its chemical weapons. While announcing the destruction of his country's last chemical weapons on September 27, 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin said, "The US, unfortunately, is not carrying out its obligations when it comes to the timeframe of destroying chemical weapons - they pushed back the liquidation timeframe already three times." The US and Russia are parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which required them to destroy their stockpiles by 2007 with a potential extension until 2012. However, both countries failed to meet the 2012 deadline. Later, Russia set a 2015 target date for eliminating its chemical weapons and again extended it to 2020.

- On September 28, Larry Pressler, former US Senator, said that Indo-US Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, signed in October 2008, is more of an arms deal.

Pressler, who has served as chairman of the US Senate's Arms Control Subcommittee, said, "I would love to see peaceful use of nuclear energy, but I am worried that so far Indo-US nuclear agreement has mostly been an arms deal. It seems to me that much of the new agreement is a large arms sale to Indians." Pressler made his comments during the launch of his book, 'Unveiling Neighbours in Arms,' in Delhi. He also said that US President Donald Trump may declare Pakistan 'a terror state', if the country did not act against terrorists.

- On September 27, India's Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) sanctioned \$125 million for the purchase of Klub supersonic cruise missiles from Russia.

The decision was taken during the DAC's meeting chaired by India's Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The Klub missiles would be fitted onto the Indian Navy's older warships including the Kora class missile corvettes and the Delhi class frigates. The 6.2-meter-long Klub missile is capable of carrying warheads of up to 450 kilograms with the capability of engaging both static and moving targets. DAC also cleared the procurement of upgraded sonar for the Navy's destroyers and frigates, boosting their anti-submarine warfare capabilities. Seven systems of HUMSA-UG Sonar will be installed on the Teg Class, Godavari- Class frigates and R-Class destroyers. They are designed, developed and manufactured indigenously by India's Defence

Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory.

- On September 27, Chung Eui-yong, South Korea's National Security Adviser to President Moon Jae-in, indicated that the US would send its "strategic" military assets to the country on a regular basis to better deter North Korea.

Eui-yong said, "US strategic assets could be deployed before the end of 2017." Park Wan-joo, spokesman for the ruling Democratic Party, stressed, "the deployment would help us expand our defence capabilities." However, he did not explain what those "strategic assets" would be. According to experts, South Korean officials usually use the term to refer to B-52 bombers, stealth warplanes, nuclear-powered submarines and aircraft carriers. The Pentagon also confirmed that both Moon and US President Donald Trump agreed to enhance deployment of US strategic assets in and around South Korea on a rotational basis when they met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly Conference. Earlier, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho had threatened on September 25, 2017, to shoot down US military planes, even if they are not in the country's airspace.

- On September 26, Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) signed a contract with Research Centre Imarat (RCI) for supply of Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (MRSAM) to the Indian Army.

According to a statement issued by BDL, the contract was signed for production, deliveries and support of MRSAM system for the Army. The MRSAM defence system will be produced by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in association with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). According to various reports, the Indian Army would receive the delivery of the system in the next three years. MRSAM defence system is capable of shooting down cruise missiles and fighter jets, drones, surveillance aircraft, up to a range of 70 kilometres.

- During an interview with *Reuters* on September 26, Yukiya Amano, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General, urged major powers to clarify a provision, Section T, of July 2015 Nuclear Agreement signed with Iran dealing with technology that could be used to develop an atom bomb.

While reiterating that Iran was implementing its nuclear commitments under the July 2015 Nuclear Agreement, Amano indicated that IAEA had no tools or means to verify Section T of the agreement. He said that unlike many other parts of the agreement, Section T makes no mention of the IAEA or specifics of how it will be verified. "In other sections, for example, Iran has committed to submit declarations, place their activities under safeguards or ensure access by us. But in Section T I don't see any such commitment," he added. The Section T bans activities which could contribute to the development of a nuclear explosive device. It lists examples such as using computer models that simulate a nuclear bomb, or designing multi-point, explosive

detonation systems. Amano said that parties to the agreement should discuss the issue in the Joint Commission, a forum created by the agreement. On September 28, Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the UN, accused Russia of shielding Iran from inspections by the IAEA of some activities under section T. Russia maintains that the IAEA has no authority to monitor compliance with the section by conducting inspections. With regard to Russia's view, Haley said, "Now it appears that some countries are attempting to shield Iran from even more inspections." She said, Iran nuclear agreement is empty without comprehensive inspections.

- On September 23, Iran successfully test-fired its new indigenously developed medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM), capable of delivering multiple warheads using Multiple Independently targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology.

Iran's state television carried the footage of the launch of the missile, known as Khoramshahr, which has a range of 2,000 kilometres and can carry multiple warheads. Iran said that its new missile is designed to carry only conventional warheads. Amir Hatami, Iran's Defence Minister, said, "As long as some speak in the language of threats, the strengthening of the country's defence capabilities will continue and Iran will not seek permission from any country for producing various kinds of missile." The Khoramshahr missile was first displayed alongside other missiles on September 22, 2017, during a high-profile military parade in Tehran, marking the anniversary of the outbreak of its devastating 1980-1988 war with Iraq. Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said that the missile has been manufactured in a smaller and more tactical size and will be put into operation in the near future. Apart from Khoramshahr missile, Iran's latest military and defence achievements and missiles, including 6 Qiam missiles, 2 Qadr-F missiles, 2 Qard H missiles, 4 Emad missiles, 2 Sejil missiles and 2 Zolfaqar missiles were also displayed at the parade. During the ceremony, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani vowed that Iran would boost its missile capabilities despite warnings from the US that it is ready to tear up a landmark nuclear deal over Iran's ballistic missile development. Rouhani said, "Whether you like it or not, we are going to strengthen our military capabilities which are necessary for deterrence."

- On September 23, Pakistan Navy successfully test-fired an air-to-surface anti-ship missile from its Sea King helicopter in northern Arabian Sea

According to a press release issued by the Navy, the missile successfully hit the intended target with pinpoint accuracy, reaffirming the weapon's lethality and the offensive power of the Pakistan Navy. Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah, Chief of Naval Staff, witnessed the missile firing demonstration. Expressing his complete satisfaction with the combat readiness, he reaffirmed the resolve of Pakistan Navy to ensure country's seaward defence and safeguard maritime interests at all costs.

- According to Dawn on September 22, US President Donald Trump ordered new sanctions on North Korea, blacklisting people and entities doing business with the country, including its shipping and trade networks.

Trump said, “Today I’m announcing a new executive order, just signed, that significantly expands our authority to target individual companies, financial institutions that finance and facilitate trade with North Korea.” He added, “Our new executive order will cut off sources of revenue that fund North Korea’s efforts to develop the deadliest weapons known to humankind.” With the help of new set of sanctions, the US would target North Korea’s textiles, fishing, information technology, and manufacturing industries. Moreover, US Department of the Treasury designated eight North Korean banks and 26 individuals linked to North Korean financial networks in response to North Korea’s ongoing development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) on September 26, 2017. The individuals sanctioned are North Korean nationals operating in China, Russia, Libya and the United Arab Emirates who act as representatives of North Korean banks. Steven Mnuchin, Treasury Secretary, said that the sanctions were imposed to complement a Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 2375) adopted on September 11, 2017. The UN Security Council has unanimously imposed nine rounds of sanctions on North Korea since 2006.

- On September 22, a number of resolutions were adopted on the final day of the 61st International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) General Conference, held in Vienna from 18-22 September, 2017, to further strengthen the IAEA’s work.

At the end of the week-long Conference, delegates adopted various resolutions to strengthen international cooperation in nuclear safety, security, nuclear science and technology. While approving the IAEA’s budget for 2018, delegates also adopted resolutions on the implementation of the safeguards agreement between the IAEA and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the application of safeguards in the Middle East. During the conference, Yukiya Amano has been reappointed as the Director General of the IAEA to a further four-year term of office, which will commence on December 1, 2017. The IAEA General Conference takes place annually, giving an opportunity to all IAEA Member States to jointly consider matters related to the IAEA’s ongoing work, budget and priorities.

- On September 21, Izumi Nakamitsu, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, warned against emerging technologies that make the acquisition and use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) easier and stressed the need for effective approaches in curbing the proliferation WMDs.

While addressing the UNSC’s meeting on non-proliferation of WMDs, Nakamitsu said, “The Council’s engagement on WMDs has always been grounded on a common understanding that measures for disarmament and non-proliferation are two sides of the same coin and are mutually-reinforcing.” Though the international community continues to face unresolved questions of disarmament, the UNSC has achieved important milestones through its disarmament and non-proliferation efforts over the past 25 years, she added. While counting the UNSC’s achievements, she mentioned that direct engagement and cooperation had resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis. She said that it

was timely action by the Council that had enabled international inspectors to help Libya secure and remove its vulnerable stockpiles of chemical agents. In Syria, also, the elimination of the country's declared chemical weapons programme was completed under UN supervision. Regarding North Korea's continued defiance of international obligations, she urged the Council to facilitate the resumption of diplomacy for a peaceful settlement.

- On September 20, a legally-binding treaty, known as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), opened for signatures at the United Nations Headquarters in New York during a ceremony held on the margins of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly.

While declaring the Treaty open for signature, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, "The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is the product of increasing concerns over the risk posed by the continued existence of nuclear weapons, including the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of their use." Some 50 nations participated in the ceremony to sign the treaty, affirming their commitment to disarmament. The TPNW was adopted on July 7, 2017, at a UN conference in New York by a vote of 122 in favour to one against by Netherlands and with one abstention from Singapore. However, nuclear-armed States and most of their allies stayed out of the negotiations. The treaty prohibits a full range of nuclear-weapon-related activities, including the undertaking to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as well as the use or threat of use of these weapons. Of 50 countries that signed the treaty, Guyana, the Holy See, and Thailand also deposited their instruments of ratification on September 20, 2017. The Treaty would enter into force 90 days after it has been ratified by at least 50 countries.

- On September 20, India announced that it was collaborating with Russia to build the Rooppur nuclear power plant in Bangladesh, the first initiative under Indo-Russia deal to undertake atomic energy projects in third countries.

While addressing the 61st General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, India's Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Sekhar Basu said, "We are collaborating with our partners in establishing the Rooppur power plant in Bangladesh." However, Basu did not elaborate on the nature of collaboration with Russia. India and Bangladesh signed three MoUs on civil nuclear cooperation during the visit of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India in April 2017 under which the two sides can supply and manufacture equipment, material for the atomic power plant. In December 2014 India and Russia signed a "Strategic Vision for Strengthening Cooperation in Using Peaceful Atomic Energy." According to the agreement, the two sides will explore opportunities for sourcing materials, equipment and services from Indian industry for the construction of the Russian-designed nuclear power plants in third countries.

- On September 20, UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed the UN's readiness to help bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force.

During his remarks to a biennial conference on facilitating the CTBT's entry into force, held at UN Headquarters in New York, Guterres said, "If there is something I take very seriously it is the fact that, as Secretary-General, I am the depository of the CTBT." Some 183 States have signed and 166 States have ratified the treaty, since its adoption in 1996. The treaty would enter into force after its ratification by all the 44 States that formally participated in the 1996 session of the Conference on Disarmament and possessed nuclear power or research reactors at the time. Of the 44 States, China, Iran, the US, Egypt and Israel have signed the treaty but not yet ratified it. DPRK, India and Pakistan have not signed it. Calling upon countries to ratify the CTBT, Guterres said that North Korea's actions are not only undermining the importance of the treaty but are also dangerous for global stability.

- According to the *Saudi Press Agency* on September 20, Saudi Arabia signed a framework deal on military and security with Britain, two days after Qatar signed a deal to buy fighter jets from Britain.
- On September 18, Qatar signed an agreement to buy 24 Typhoon fighter jets from Britain, the second major defence deal signed by the country during its lengthy diplomatic dispute with its Gulf neighbours.

The agreement came after Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discussed security ties with visiting British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon in Jeddah. "During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral relations particularly the mechanism and joint coordination in the field of defence. They also discussed efforts to combat terrorism. However, the report did not give details of the agreement. Earlier on September 18, 2017, Khalid bin Mohammed al-Attiyah, Qatar's Minister of State for Defence, and his British counterpart Michael Fallon signed a 'statement of intent' for the UK to sell 24 Typhoon fighter jets to Qatar. Fallon said, "This will be the first major defence contract with Qatar, one of the UK's strategic partners." He added, "This is an important moment in our defence relationship and the basis for even closer defence cooperation between our two countries." In June 2017, Qatar had signed an agreement with the US to buy F-15 jets with an initial cost of \$12 billion.

- On September 18, US President Donald Trump warned that the US would walk away from Iran's July 2015 Nuclear Agreement if it found International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) monitoring not tough enough on the country.

The warning from the US came in a message during the IAEA's General Conference, held in Vienna from September 18 to 22, 2017. The US also asserted that Iran is obligated to open its military sites to IAEA inspection on demand if the IAEA suspects unreported nuclear activities at any of them. US Energy Secretary Rick Perry also told the Vienna meeting that the US would "not accept a weakly enforced or inadequately monitored deal." However, Ali Akbar Salehi, the

Head of Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, accused the US of undermining the nuclear agreement. He said, "The American administration's overtly hostile attitude and actual foot-dragging policies and measures aimed at undermining the nuclear deal are contrary to the letter and spirit of the accord." Salehi also rejected US Ambassador Nikki Haley's demand that IAEA inspect Iran's military sites. Salehi urged the IAEA and its head, Yukiya Amano, to resist such unacceptable demands.

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA & EAST ASIA

China

- During his visit to Beijing on September 30, Rex Tillerson, the US Secretary of State, met with Chinese President, Xi Jinping and other senior officials in Beijing.

Following the talks, Tillerson said he believes China has become concerned about North Korea's missile and nuclear programme and is working to convince Pyongyang to re-enter talks. Citing the Secretary of State, Tillerson, Aljazeera reported on September 30, 2017, that the US has opened channels of communication with North Korea. Furthermore, Tillerson also said that the US would not recognise North Korea as a nuclear power.

- In his speech at the opening of Interpol's General Assembly in Beijing on September 26, Chinese President, Xi Jinping said that all nations have a right to be involved in regional and global security issues.

President Xi called for "global security governance" and pledged to support the Interpol in its efforts to combat terrorism and cyber-crime. He said that China would also sponsor police training under the Interpol umbrella that would include setting up a police academy to train law enforcement personnel for developing countries.

- According to Chinese Commerce Ministry on September 28, North Korean companies that are operating in the country will have to shut down by January, 2018.

The development came in response to North Korea's sixth nuclear test. Earlier on September 11, 2017, the UN Security Council voted unanimously for fresh sanctions on North Korea.

North Korea

- On September 20, North Korea's Foreign Minister, Ri Yong Ho responded to US President Donald Trump's threat to "completely destroy," saying it is a "dog's bark" and suggested that Pyongyang would not be deterred by the rhetoric.

Ri Yong Ho, who was in the US for the United Nations General Assembly, said he "felt sorry" for President Trump's advisers. His comments follow US President Donald Trump's address to the United Nations on September 19, 2017 during which he threatened to, "totally destroy North Korea." Earlier on September 16, 2017, Korean Central News Agency quoted North Korean leader, Kim Jong-Un as saying that North Korea would maintain, "the equilibrium of real force with the US." Referring to the launch of Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile over Japan on September 15, 2017, Kim said that North Korea's "combat power of the nuclear force" had increased.

Myanmar

- In a televised address on September 19, Myanmar's State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi spoke about her country's crackdown on the Rohingya minority, insisting that her country was not "afraid of international scrutiny."

Suu Kyi did not denounce atrocities against the Rohingya community and claimed the government needed more time to investigate the migration from Myanmar of more than 400,000 members of the Rohingya community. Her speech drew widespread international criticism. Amnesty International described the speech as a "mix of untruths and victim blaming." The speech was Suu Kyi's first since a crackdown by the country's military in Rakhine state.

Thailand

- On September 30, Thailand's Supreme Court declared former Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra guilty of negligence in a rice subsidy case, sentencing her in absentia to five years in jail.

The court also unanimously agreed that the sentence will not be suspended. In August 2017, Yingluck Shinawatra, fled Thailand and has not attended court hearings. It is believed that she is living in Dubai.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

EUROPE

- On September 30, a rally of neo-Nazis in Sweden ended in clashes with both anti-fascist counter-demonstrators and police.

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR) group had planned a march through the city of Gothenburg. Scuffles broke out between police and the shield-carrying NMR group when, members attempted to deviate from the agreed route. Dozens of people have been arrested, including the group's leader, Swedish media reported.

- BBC reported on September 30 that one of NATO's biggest European military exercises was under way off the Scottish Coast.

Exercise Joint Warrior is held twice annually in spring and autumn. The second part of the 2017 exercises involves warships from European navies, as well as those from the US and Canada. NATO army personnel will also be involved. The exercise will test battlefield and anti-terrorism tactics, as well as training in anti-smuggling operations and humanitarian missions.

- According to the *Guardian* on September 30, the European Commission is examining the increased detention and deportation of EU citizens from Britain and has warned it will take "appropriate action" against Theresa May's government if it believes the rights of EU nationals are being compromised.

Detentions and enforced removals of EU citizens from the UK have increased considerably since the Brexit vote, prompting critics to claim the Home Office is deliberately targeting EU nationals.

- On September 30, police sealed off 1,300 of 2,315 schools in Catalonia designated as polling stations for the region's banned independence referendum.

The move came as the Spanish authorities increased efforts to stop the October 1, 2017 referendum. Police have taken over Catalonia's telecommunications centre. Spain's Constitutional Court has declared the planned ballot illegal. The authorities in Madrid have sent thousands of police to the region to stop the referendum. They are being assisted by the Catalan regional police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra.

- On September 29, a Spanish court ordered Google to remove a voting location app from its Play Store, saying it was helping Catalan separatists to organise in advance of the disputed independence referendum vote.

Joan Maria Piqué, International Communications Director for the government of Catalonia said that police entered the offices of a company that works for Google to execute the Catalonia High Court order to delete the “On Votar 1-Oct” app and that some people were held for a few hours. Google was also ordered to block other future applications put forward by the developer, which had used an email that includes the vote’s date.

- On September 23, Spanish Authorities moved to place all policing in Catalonia under central control to stop the disputed independence referendum on October 1.

Madrid said the order was aimed at achieving better coordination. However the Catalan authorities rejected it, saying it was an unacceptable interference. Thousands of extra police were being sent to the region to block the vote. The Constitutional Court says the vote is illegal but Catalan leaders are determined to hold it.

- The *BBC* reported on September 29 that former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder is facing a backlash after being elected chairman of the Russian state-controlled oil giant Rosneft.

The appointment reaffirms his controversial links with Moscow. He has long been a friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Western World imposed sanctions on Rosneft after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. The chair of the German parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee said Schroeder’s move was “unbelievable.”

- According to EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker on September 29, it would take a “miracle” for Brexit talks to progress quickly enough to persuade the EU to start discussing trade soon.

Juncker agreed progress had been made between the two sides this week. When asked if it was enough to persuade the EU to agree to open trade talks, as the UK wants, he replied only if “miracles happen.” However British PM Theresa May said she was “pleased” with recent developments. Speaking in Estonia, where she is attending an EU security summit, May said there had been movement on issues such as citizens’ rights during the fourth round of Brexit talks which concluded on September 28, 2017.

- On September 28 British PM Theresa May threatened a trade war with the US after it imposed punitive tariffs on British-built aircraft.

The tariffs have cast doubt on a key plank of May’s Brexit strategy. The US Department of Commerce decided Bombardier aircraft, built in Northern Ireland, should be subject to 219%

import duty after the American aviation giant Boeing complained that Bombardier had been given unfair advantage. May's Government responded by warning that Boeing's behaviour "could jeopardise" future Ministry of Defence contracts for its aircraft such as Apache helicopters.

- On September 20, unions and politicians called for Tata Steel and Thyssenkrupp to safeguard Welsh jobs when they go ahead with their planned merger.

The Indian and German companies signed a memorandum of understanding to combine their European steel operations in a 50-50 venture. It will lead to about 4000 job losses. Tata employs almost 7,000 people in Wales, including more than 4,000 in Port Talbot, the largest steel works in the UK.

- On September 25 Police arrested the seventh suspect in Cardiff over the London Tube bombing.

The UK terror threat was increased to its highest level following the Tube bombing in southwest London. Some 1,000 armed officers were seen across the country after military assistance was requested. Three of the seven people arrested so far have been released while Ahmed Hasan an 18-year-old Iraqi refugee, was charged with attempted murder and explosives offences over the attack.

- According to the BBC on September 19, online jihadist propaganda attracts more clicks in the UK than any other country in Europe.

Britain is the fifth-biggest audience in the world for extremist content after Turkey, the US, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, according to a Policy Exchange Study. The think tank suggested the UK public would support new laws criminalising reading content that glorifies terror. In his foreword to the report, Former US Military Chief General David Petraeus, said efforts to combat online extremism remain "inadequate."

- According to the *Telegraph* on September 17, a teenager suspected of being behind the September 15, 2017 Parsons Green bombing had spoken to the police a number of times.

The 18-year-old Iraqi refugee was a "problem" to his foster parents and they had been contacting officials saying that they were unable to cope. He was arrested on suspicion of planting the homemade bomb, which partially detonated on a District Line train injuring 29 people.

- According to the *Guardian* on September 17, billionaire Russian oligarchs and Ukrainian elites accused of corruption are among hundreds of people who have acquired EU passports under Cyprus' controversial "golden visa" schemes.

The government of Cyprus has raised more than €4bn since 2013 by providing citizenship to the rich, granting them the right to live and work throughout Europe in exchange for cash investment. More than 400 passports were issued through this scheme in 2016. Prior to 2013, a less formal version of the current arrangement existed whereby Ministers granted Cypriot citizenship on a discretionary basis.

- On September 16, EU leaders agreed to make “swift” progress on raising the tax bills for tech giants including Facebook and Google.

Smaller states have warned however that unilateral action could drive business away from Europe. France is pushing for a new way of taxing them on the basis of turnover and not profits to increase the amount collected from companies accused of paying too little in Europe. Currently, such companies tend to be taxed on profits booked by subsidiaries in low-tax countries such as Ireland even when their revenues originate from other EU states.

---Amina Afzal

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Egypt

- On September 19, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a meeting for the first time in public.

Egyptian authorities issued a statement saying the meeting was part of an effort to revive the Middle East peace process. Netanyahu recently announced that ties between Israel and its Arab neighbours have been improving and that cooperation exists "in various ways and at different levels". In recent weeks, Egypt hosted delegations from Palestinian Hamas group and its rival Fatah movement to help reach an agreement between the two sides and talk about the Gaza border. Earlier, on September 17, 2017, Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman, Mahmoud Abbas also met Sisi in Cairo where they agreed to continue working toward a two-state solution. On September 17, 2017, Egypt helped broker an agreement with the Hamas group to dissolve the administration that runs Gaza and hold talks with Fatah movement. The group led by Ismail Haniyeh, which has ruled Gaza since a brief Palestinian civil war in 2007, said it had taken 'a courageous, serious and patriotic decision to dissolve the administrative committee' that runs the territory of two million people, and hand over power to some form of unity government.

Iraq

- Kurdish officials announced on September 27 that the Kurdish referendum on independence from Iraq was approved by more than 92 % of voters.
- On September 29, Iraqi government cut the autonomous northern Kurdish region's direct air links with the outside world indefinitely.

The Head of the Kurdish region's Election Commission, Hendrin Mohammed announced the official results saying the referendum passed with 92.73 % support and turnout of more than 72%. The vote was held across the autonomous Kurdish region's three provinces as well as in some disputed territories controlled by Kurdish forces and claimed by Baghdad. According to Mohammed, the counting of votes was complete and that the results would be considered final once they are certified by the Kurdish region's department of justice. According to observers, even with strong support, the non-binding vote is unlikely to lead to formal independence. However, it has augmented tensions with Baghdad, which has moved to block flights in and out of the Kurds' autonomous region. Iraq and its neighbours, as well as the international community, are opposed to an independent Kurdistan. Iraq's Arab-dominated Parliament has given Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi the mandate to deploy troops in the disputed territories. Al-Abadi said he doesn't want a 'fight between the Iraqi citizens'. However, during a meeting with lawmakers, he vowed to 'enforce the rule of the federal authority in the Kurdish region with

the power of the constitution'. Parliament has demanded that Baghdad refrain from taking part in any dialogue with the Kurds until the referendum results are cancelled. Washington has showed willingness to facilitate talks between the Iraqi Kurdish authorities and Baghdad to calm escalating tensions over the independence referendum.

Israel

- *Press Tv reported on September 30 that Norway offered to allow Israeli nuclear whistleblower, Mordechai Vanunu and his Norwegian wife to immigrate to Norway.*

Vanunu is a former nuclear technician who served 18 years in prison for leaking details and pictures of Israel's nuclear weapons programme to Britain's Sunday Times newspaper in 1986. He was released in 2004 with a stringent set of restrictions, including a ban on speaking with foreigners and leaving Israel. According to his wife, Kristin Joachimsen, the Israeli restrictions on her husband were up for review in November 2017 and expressed hope that they would be lifted. According to analysts, Israel is the only possessor of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, but its policy is to neither confirm nor deny its nuclear weapons programme.

- *According to Jonathan Conricus, an Israeli Military spokesman, on September 19, the Military fired a Patriot missile to bring down an Iranian-made drone operated by Hezbollah on a reconnaissance mission over the Golan Heights.*

According to Conricus, the drone took off from a Damascus military airport before entering the demilitarised zone approaching the Israeli-controlled part of the Golan Heights. He said the military scrambled fighter jets but they did not engage the drone. It was shot down by one Patriot missile fired by the Israeli Air Defence. He said details of the drone were still being evaluated, including whether or not it was armed. It fell in the buffer zone between the Israeli and Syrian-controlled parts of the Golan Heights. According to observers, Syria and Israel are technically still at war. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, there have been numerous ceasefire violations between the Israeli and Syrian controlled parts of the Golan Heights. Israel seized 1,200 square kilometres of the Golan Heights from Syria during the Six-Day War of 1967. The international community criticised Israel for its annexation of this territory.

Palestine

- *On September 27, the international police agency Interpol voted and included Palestine as a member state.*

Interpol announced the inclusion of the 'State of Palestine' as well as the Solomon Islands on Twitter and its website following a vote by its general assembly in Beijing. With the new

members, Interpol will have 192 member countries. According to observers, the development is a new boost to Palestinian efforts for international recognition and influence amid long-stalled negotiations with Israel for statehood. Palestinian Foreign Minister, Riyad al-Maliki appreciated the vote as a 'victory for law enforcement' and 'voice of confidence in the capacity of law enforcement in Palestine'. He promised to uphold Palestinian commitments to combating crime and strengthening the rule of law. According to critics and opponents, recognising Palestine in international organisations undermines negotiations with Israel for full statehood.

- During his address to the 72nd United Nations General Assembly Session on September 20, Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas called on the UN to end Israel's "apartheid" regime in the occupied Palestinian territories.

President Abbas said, "We are entrusted and you are entrusted to end apartheid in Palestine." He also condemned Israel's settlement activities, stressing that they are "everywhere" and are jeopardising the so-called two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He also said, "If the United Nations does not want to implement its resolutions or to attempt to implement them, then who will implement them? Israel does not have the will... This is your responsibility as well."

- On September 20, Palestinian rights activists and lawyers submitted a 700-page dossier to the International Criminal Court (ICC) contending that high-level Israeli officials are complicit in crimes, including apartheid, crimes against humanity and persecution in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

The groups asked the ICC to "urgently open a full investigation into the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory" as a "necessary step to ending the culture of impunity that has long prevailed in regard to Israeli crimes and to hold high-level political and military officials accountable." Shawan Jabarin, Director of Palestinian rights group 'Al-Haq', said the documents provide evidence that the regime in Tel Aviv removes Palestinians from the territories and replaces them with Israeli settlers. The documents are meant to provide evidence for a preliminary investigation launched in 2015 by The Hague-based tribunal into Israeli crimes on the occupied land and pave the way for a full-scale probe.

Qatar

- During his address to the 72nd United Nations General Assembly Session on September 19, Qatari Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani denounced the blockade imposed by the Saudi-led bloc as "unjust".

The Emir said, "I stand before you while my country and my people are subjected to an ongoing and unjust blockade imposed since June 5 by neighbouring countries. The countries that imposed the blockade on the State of Qatar interfere in the internal affairs of many countries, and accuse

all those who oppose them domestically and abroad with terrorism. By doing they are inflicting damage on the war on terror.” Sheikh Tamim highlighted Qatar’s resistance in the face of the Saudi-led bloc’s excessive demands and said Doha has “refused to yield to dictations by pressure and siege.” The Emir further called for “for an unconditional dialogue based on mutual respect for sovereignty” to end the diplomatic crisis in the Persian Gulf region. Following his address to the UNGA, Sheikh Tamim met with US President Donald Trump, where the latter said he had a “very strong feeling” the Qatar dispute would be resolved “pretty quickly.”

- According to *Dawn* on September 16, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani met German Chancellor, Angela Merkel in Berlin on his first trip abroad since a diplomatic crisis erupted between Qatar and its neighbours.

During a joint press conference, Chancellor Merkel said she hoped dialogue could lead to ‘fair compromises’. She said, “It’s cause for great concern that after 100 days a solution to this conflict is still not in sight.” The Emir reiterated that his country was open to negotiations with its neighbours. He said, “Qatar is prepared to take a seat at the table to solve this problem.” He also said that fighting terrorism “is a big priority for us and we have to concentrate on the roots of terrorism.” Germany has been supporting diplomatic efforts in an attempt to defuse the crisis. Its Foreign Minister has said the country’s intelligence service would play a role in clearing up accusations that Qatar supports terrorist groups. Following the meetings with Merkel, the Emir went to Paris for talks with French President, Emmanuel Macron.

Syria

- According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, on September 29, at least 73 Syrian government troops and allied fighters were killed by Daesh in surprise attacks on their positions in central Homs province.

Daesh claimed the attacks on several positions south of the town of Sukhna saying its fighters had killed dozens of regime troops. The attacks followed an audio recording released by its leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in which he urged resistance. Earlier, on September 28, Daesh targeted government forces around Deir ez-Zor as well as their supply lines through the Sukhna area from the west.

- According to Syria’s official news agency SANA, on September 27, the US-led coalition dropped internationally-banned white phosphorus bombs in Syria’s eastern province of Deir ez-Zor.

The airstrikes targeted the outskirts of al-Suwar town killing three civilians and injuring five others. The aerial assaults also damaged residential buildings in the area. Earlier, on September 26, 2017, at least nine civilians were killed in US-led airstrikes on the town of Markadah.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 2,800 civilians had been killed in US-led airstrikes across Syria over the past three years. The US-led air raids also injured hundreds of civilians, some of whom suffered permanent disabilities. The aerial raids caused massive destruction of residential buildings and civilian infrastructure as well.

- During his address to the 72nd United Nations General Assembly on September 23, Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid al Muallem said that a military victory in the Syrian war was 'now within reach' following a series of battleground gains by government forces.

Muallem also holds the rank of Deputy Prime Minister in Bashar al-Assad's government. He said, "The liberation of Aleppo and Palmyra, the lifting of the siege of Deir ez-Zor and the eradication of terrorism from many parts of Syria prove that victory is now within reach." Muallem also said Syrian government forces will be remembered as heroes for their role in the war.

- On September 19, terrorist groups linked with al-Qaeda launched a heavy offensive against Syrian pro-government forces in one of the recently announced de-escalation zones.

The pro-government forces responded with heavy air strikes targeting hospitals and first responders. According to opposition activists and rescue workers, at least two civilians were killed. They also said that two hospitals, and two centres used by volunteer first responders known as the White Helmets, had been rendered non-operational. According to pro-government media, the air strikes targeted insurgent supply lines from the northwestern Idlib province, a stronghold of al-Qaeda terrorists. Russia, Iran and Turkey recently declared four de-escalation zones in Syria. The zones have freed up Syrian troops and allied militias to battle Daesh in the eastern Deir ez-Zor province and other areas.

Turkey

- During a televised speech on September 30, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Israel's Mossad spy agency played a role in the Kurdish independence referendum in northern Iraq.

Erdogan expressed sorrow that Iraqi Kurds acclaimed the recent independence referendum with Israeli flags. He said, "This shows one thing, that this administration (in northern Iraq) has a history with Mossad, they are hand-in-hand together. Are you aware of what you are doing? Only Israel supports you." According to observers, while much of the international community, including the UN, the EU and Iraq's neighbours, opposed the referendum, Israel remained the only entity to openly support an independent Kurdish state, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu backing "the legitimate efforts of the Kurdish people to attain a state of their own".

- On September 28, Russian President, Vladimir Putin visited Turkey and held talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan focussing on bilateral trade between the two countries and the situation in Iraq and Syria.

During a joint press conference, President Putin said de-escalation zones in Syria have created the “de facto conditions necessary for the end of the fratricidal war in Syria and the final defeat of terrorists as well as for the Syrian people’s return to normal life”. Both the leaders asserted that they agreed to make further push for the creation of the Idlib de-escalation zone to help end foreign-backed militancy in Syria. Putin also noted that Moscow and Ankara would work “with the aim of deepening the coordination of joint activity to solve the Syrian crisis.” President Erdogan highlighted the need for a “joint political will” to resolve the Syrian crisis. The Syrian deal helped improve ties and restore bilateral trade and the flow of Russian tourists to Turkey, halted in the wake of the 2015 plane incident. Putin and Erdogan also talked about the Iraqi Kurdish referendum with the Turkish President denouncing it as a “big mistake” that eroded stability in the region.

- On September 28, Turkey threatened restrictions on oil trading with Iraqi Kurds following the Kurdish referendum.
- During a televised speech on September 26, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the Iraqi Kurdistan region against pushing for independence following a non-binding referendum, saying it risked sparking an ‘ethnic war’ in the region.

Erdogan said, “If Barzani and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) do not go back on this mistake as soon as possible, they will go down in history with the shame of having dragged the region into an ethnic and sectarian war.” He further warned the Iraqi Kurdish leader, Masoud Barzani, that his region risked going short on food and clothing if Turkish sanctions were applied. Erdogan described the vote as a “treason to our country” since it had come at a time of good relations between Ankara and the neighbouring KRG. He urged Barzani to ‘give up on an adventure which can only have a dark end.’ Erdogan reaffirmed that Turkey would consider all options, from economic sanctions to military measures. According to the office of Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al Abadi, he had been told by Turkish Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim that Turkey would break with past practice and deal only with the Baghdad government over oil exports from Iraq. Most oil that flows through a pipeline from Iraq to Turkey comes from Kurdish sources and a cut-off would severely damage the KRG, which relies on sales of crude oil for almost all its currency revenues.

- On September 23, the Turkish Parliament approved a one-year extension of a mandate to use troops abroad in Syria and Iraq.

According to Defence Minister, Nurettin Canikli, the extension was intended to protect Turkey from ‘threats’, and the Kurdish Regional Government’s referendum was a ‘threat to national

security'. Ankara has repeatedly warned Arbil of the 'heavy cost' of the poll, while Iraq, Iran and the US have urged the KRG against the non-binding referendum vote. Canikli said the vote demonstrated 'an abdication of reason' and Turkey viewed any referendum like this as 'null and void'. Earlier, Turkish Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim warned Ankara's actions in response to the vote would have 'diplomatic, political, economic and security dimensions'.

- During his address to the 72nd United Nations General Assembly Session on September 19, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the Kurdish referendum in northern Iraq could lead to a global conflict.

Turkey has also started a military drill and is training tank guns and rocket launchers across the southern border. It has turned its weapons towards Kurdish-run northern Iraq. According to Turkish Defence Minister, Nurettin Canikli, the referendum posed a major risk and Turkey would take 'every step' needed to thwart any similar steps in its mainly Kurdish southeast. Earlier, on September 18, 2017, Iraq's Supreme Court had ordered the suspension of the referendum on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's office had also filed a complaint against the referendum on constitutional grounds.

Yemen

- On September 29, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to send war crimes investigators to Yemen to examine alleged violations committed by all parties in the civil war.

Under the deal agreed to in Geneva, a group of "eminent international and regional experts" would carry out a comprehensive examination of "all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights and other appropriate and applicable fields of international law" in Yemen. It would "establish the facts and circumstances surrounding the alleged violations and abuses, and where possible, identify those responsible". It was a compromise between Western powers and a group of Arab states that included Saudi Arabia. According to the UN, more than 8,530 people, 60% of them civilians, have been killed and 48,800 injured in air strikes and fighting on the ground since March 2015. The conflict has also left 20.7 million people in need of some kind of humanitarian assistance, created the largest food security emergency in the world, and led to a cholera outbreak that is believed to have affected 700,000 people since April 2017.

---Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA

Pakistan External

- Addressing the UN General Assembly on September 22, Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi urged for “a just, peaceful and expeditious resolution of the dispute over Kashmir and called on the Security Council to secure the implementation of its own resolution on the region.”

Abbasi also demanded that an international investigation mechanism be sent to Kashmir “to verify the nature and extent of India’s human rights violations” and hold it accountable. Abbasi accused India of indulging in terror activities against his country and warned of a “matching response” if India “ventures across the Line of Control or acts upon its doctrine of “limited war” against Pakistan. The Premier further said that any strategy to combat global terrorism must focus on addressing the root causes behind such violence and stressed that it is, “galling for Pakistan to be blamed for the military or political stalemate in Afghanistan.” He reiterated, “We are not prepared to be anyone’s scapegoat.” PM Abbasi also termed China’s ‘Belt and Road’ initiative as a “clear path to prosperity as well as a model of South-South cooperation.”

Exercising its right to reply after Pakistan Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi’s address at the UN General Assembly, India said, “the State of Jammu and Kashmir is and will always remain an integral part of India.” India also called Pakistan a “terroristan”, and said it has become “a geography synonymous with terror.”

- On September 19, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi met US Vice President Mike Pence on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

The two leaders agreed that their countries would remain engaged constructively to achieve the shared objectives of peace, stability and economic prosperity in the region. Following the meeting, Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary, Tehmina Janjua said that the meeting had helped end the stalemate between the two countries. She also said the Prime Minister apprised the US Vice President about decisions taken by the Pakistan’s National Security Committee following President Trump’s policy statement on Afghanistan and South Asia. According to media reports, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said in his message that Pakistan is part of international efforts against terrorism and has suffered huge losses in this war.

Meanwhile, speaking at Washington’s Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) on September 20, 2017, Prime Minister Abbasi demanded the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution on Kashmir, asserting that his country would continue to support the right of self-determination in the state. The PM also said that Pakistan does not have any “fielded tactical nuclear weapons” and warned that Pakistan has developed short-range nuclear weapons in response to India’s Cold Start Doctrine. He further made it clear that India has “zero” political or military role in Afghanistan.

- Speaking at the Asia Society forum on September 25, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif asked the US not to blame Pakistan for the Haqqani network and other

terrorist groups. He reminded the US that these terrorists were considered as “darlings” by the White House up until a few years ago.

Khawaja Asif said, “the Haqqanis, Hafiz Saeed and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) are liabilities,” and asked for more time to eliminate them saying “we don’t have the assets to match these liabilities.” Asif further stressed that there was no military solution to the Afghan conflict. In a related development on September 28, 2017, the National Assembly Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs criticised the Foreign Minister’s remarks during a media interaction in the US in which he suggested that Pakistan, “must put its house in order.” His statement drew immense condemnation from the opposition leaders who blamed him for undermining Pakistan’s security.

- On September 22, Myanmar’s Foreign Ministry summoned Pakistan’s Ambassador to Yangon, Khalid Memon to protest over Pakistan’s ‘critical highlighting’ of the Rohingya issue.

Earlier on September 9, 2017, Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry summoned Myanmar’s envoy in Islamabad, U Win Myint, to protest against the persecution of the Rohingya community and called for immediate measures to prevent such violence.

- According to *Radio Pakistan* on September 18, Swiss Ambassador to Pakistan was summoned by the Foreign Office in Islamabad to lodge protest over the “Free Balochistan” advertisement campaign in Geneva.

Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to UN at Geneva, Farrukh Amil in his letter to his Swiss counterpart, Ambassador Valentin Zellweger asked the Swiss government to take firm action against those involved in this act. He noted that the use of Swiss soil by terrorist and violent secessionists was “totally unacceptable.” He also said that a Swiss advertising agency APG SA was involved in the display of posters which mentioned the name of “Baluchistan House” as sponsor. He said that the Baluchistan House (BH) was an affiliate of the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), which is a listed terrorist organisation under the laws of Pakistan and other countries, including the UK. Pakistan’s Foreign Office accused India of funding the anti-Pakistan campaign in Geneva. In a related development, posters demanding the freedom of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and the Indian states of Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura also appeared in Geneva during the 36th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

- According to *Dawn* on September 17, Pakistan asked the World Bank to establish a court of arbitration to settle its water dispute with India after the latest round of talks ended without an agreement.

The request follows India-Pakistan talks in Washington on the Ratle and Kishanganga hydroelectric projects, located in Indian-Occupied Kashmir (IOK), over which Islamabad has raised objections. The World Bank said it would continue to work with both countries to resolve the issue. Pakistan says that the construction of Kishanganga and Ratle violates the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) and insist that the existing designs of the projects are not in line with the criteria laid down under the IWT. India has asked for the appointment of a neutral expert to look

into the issues and maintains that the concerns raised by Pakistan are “technical” ones. According to media reports, India has refused to accept any of the amendments proposed by Pakistan and also refused to agree to any of the dispute settlement options suggested by the World Bank.

Pakistan Internal

- On September 28, Pakistan’s Foreign Office spokesman, Nafees Zakaria said that there was no organised presence of Daesh in Pakistan.

Earlier on September 24, 2017, a Daesh flag was put in Islamabad by an unidentified person. Meanwhile, the Senate Standing Committee on Interior demanded a detailed report regarding the appearance of a Daesh flag in the capital.

- On September 21, four members of a family were killed in shelling by Indian Border Security Forces on border villages along the Sialkot Working Boundary.
- In a related development on September 23, a girl was killed in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) after Indian firing across the Line of Control (LoC).
- On September 22, Pakistan’s acting Foreign Secretary, Aitzaz Ahmed, summoned the Indian High Commissioner, Gautam Bambawale and condemned the ceasefire violations. The acting Foreign Secretary said that India should permit the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) to play its mandated role as per the UN Security Council Resolutions.

Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi chaired a National Security Committee (NSC) meeting on September 29, 2017. The Committee expressed deep concern over repeated ceasefire violations by India along the Line of Control (LoC). The NSC was informed that the premier handed over a dossier documenting “the systematic human rights violations by India” in Kashmir to the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres during the UN General Assembly. The latest ceasefire violations along the LoC come at a time when Pakistan is mounting pressure on the international community and the UN to intervene in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan has also demanded the UN to appoint a Special Envoy on Jammu and Kashmir.

- According to *Dawn* on September 17, Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi announced to increase the civilian share in the senior hierarchy of the country’s premier intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Previously, there was only one civilian DG post in the intelligence agency. Moreover, the prime minister has also announced to increase the number of deputy directors general (DDGs) from eight to fifteen.

India

- On September 26, US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis visited India and met his Indian counterpart, Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi.

Addressing a press conference after meeting with Secretary Mattis, Sitharaman said that India would not deploy its troops in Afghanistan. Sitharaman, however, stressed that India was prepared to increase training for Afghan security forces and boost help for infrastructure projects. Both sides also discussed the need to combat terrorism with Sitharaman urging Mattis to raise the issues of alleged safe havens for terrorists in Pakistan with Islamabad. Sitharaman also said that Secretary Mattis has assured her that he will raise with Pakistan the issue of terrorism emanating from there, adding that there can be “no tolerance to terrorists’ safe havens”. Mattis’ visit to Delhi comes after the US had asked Delhi to boost its role in Afghanistan. There have been unverified reports in the international and Indian media about India deploying troops in Afghanistan after US President Donald Trump called for greater Indian involvement in the country. However, reports in the Pakistani media claimed that there is no pressure on Delhi from the US or Afghanistan to send troops to Kabul as both sides are aware of the logistical challenges. Whilst India competes with archrival Pakistan for influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan has made it clear that India had “a zero political or military role in Afghanistan.”

- In her address to the UN General Assembly on September 23, India’s Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj called Pakistan “the pre-eminent export factory for terror.”

The main part of Swaraj’s speech remained focused on Pakistan. Responding to Pakistani PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi accusations that Delhi is involved in state-sponsored terrorism in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), Swaraj rejected the allegations and said that while India is fighting poverty, Pakistan is fighting India. Talking about “Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue” between India and Pakistan, she stressed that the proposed talks between Pakistan and India could only be held in a bilateral framework and rejected any third-party involvement. She added that the Simla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration call upon India and Pakistan to resolve all their issues bilaterally. Referring to UN resolutions on Kashmir, Swaraj said, “PM Abbasi has recalled old resolutions that have been long overtaken by events.” Exercising her right to reply, Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Maleeha Lodhi termed India as the “mother of terrorism” in South Asia. She also informed the international community to act against India if it wanted to avoid a dangerous escalation between the two neighbours. Ambassador Lodhi further said if Pakistan and India fail to resolve the Kashmir dispute, the UN and the international community have the right and the obligation to help to resolve it.

Afghanistan

- During his visit to Kabul on September 27, US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis reiterated commitment to seeking an end to the Afghan conflict.

Soon after Secretary Mattis landed in Kabul, the Taliban fired rockets at Kabul airport which the Taliban's spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid said targeted Mattis' plane. However, the attack occurred after he had left the airport. In a related development on September 28, 2017, Secretary Mattis and NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, during a joint press conference in Kabul, said, "We will watch Pakistan's choices."

- During a meeting with US President, Donald Trump on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York on September 21, Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani called his US counterpart's new strategy for South Asia as "historic" and credited it with putting his country on a path toward victory over Taliban militants.

The two leaders did not mention Pakistan in their discussion, but President Ghani said Islamabad's role is an important part of the Trump plan to end America's longest war in Afghanistan. Earlier in August 2017, the Trump Administration angered Pakistan after it accused it of providing safe havens to terrorists. Meanwhile, according to media reports, Donald Trump also asked President Ghani, to agree to the closure of a Taliban office in Qatar.

- In his address to the UN General Assembly on September 20, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani urged Pakistan to hold "a comprehensive state to state dialogue on peace, security and regional cooperation."

President Ghani said, "The Afghan government has proven that we are committed to peace through our own internal processes, as demonstrated by the peace agreement with Hizb-i-Islami." In September 2016, the Afghan government signed a peace agreement with the Hizb-i-Islami commander, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The agreement was significant since the Afghan government has struggled to revive peace talks with the Taliban.

- According to *Tolo News* on September 18, Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence said it is in the final stage of setting up a militia unit, in order to help Afghan defence and security forces to fight militants in certain parts of the country.

According to the Defence Ministry, the militia would be made up of reserve soldiers and officers to protect these areas that have been cleared of militants. The move came as Afghan Security Forces struggle in their counter insurgency war and face strong resistance from insurgents across the country. Many experts say the militia could pose bigger challenges for the government in future.

Bangladesh

- According to *Reuters* on September 16, Bangladesh accused Myanmar of repeatedly violating its air space and warned that any more "provocative acts" could have "unwarranted consequences".

According to Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Myanmar's drones and helicopters had violated its air space three times during this month. In Yangon, Myanmar's Presidential

spokesman, Zaw Htay said that while Myanmar's military denied crossing into Bangladesh's airspace, the matter was being investigated.

- On September 21, Bangladesh's Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina told the General Assembly that Myanmar must stop "ethnic cleansing" in Rakhine state, and "safe zones" should be created inside the country to protect all civilians, under the supervision of the United Nations.

She noted that her country is currently sheltering over 800,000 forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar and that the ongoing atrocities and human rights violations in Myanmar's Rakhine state once again had aggravated the situation at the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. She proposed that Myanmar unconditionally stop the practice of "ethnic cleansing" in Rakhine immediately and forever and the UN Secretary-General immediately send a fact-finding mission to Myanmar.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

UNITED NATIONS

- On September 28, Myanmar's government postponed a visit of the UN's team to the country's Rakhine state.

A spokesman from the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Myanmar said, "The government-organised visit was postponed to next week because of weather conditions." However, he did not give further details regarding the postponement of the visit. The visit would have been the first by UN officials to the area since violence broke out on August 25, 2017. Access to the area by relief agencies and global media has been heavily controlled by Myanmar's army and government, making it impossible to independently assess the humanitarian situation or allegations of widespread abuse.

- On September 27, Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria, urged the Syrian government and opposition parties to assess the situation with responsibility and to prepare to participate in the next round of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva by the end of October or in early November, 2017.

Mistura said, "The time has come for the focus to return to Geneva, and the intra-Syrian talks under the auspices of the United Nations." He stressed that Syria should show a genuine interest in having negotiations about credible, inclusive local and central governance, a schedule and process for a new constitution, and UN-supervised elections. Moreover, he also called upon the opposition that it should show its unity and readiness to speak in one voice. While cautioning both sides against illusions of victory or dreams of shortcuts, Mistura warned, "There is no substitute for an internationally supported process based on a comprehensive and inclusive approach that also helps Syrians to re-discover a modicum of trust and social cohesion after the bitterest of conflict." Intra-Syrian talks focus on the "four baskets," including a credible non-sectarian transitional government; a future constitution; early and free parliamentary elections within 18 months; and a united war against terrorism within Syria.

- On September 21, the United Nations Security Council voted for a resolution authorising the establishment of an investigation team to collect evidence on the atrocities committed by Daesh in Iraq.

According to the unanimously adopted resolution, the team will be headed by a Special Adviser, appointed by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. The resolution gives the Secretary-General 60 days to present to the Council details on the mandate of the investigative panel that would work with its Iraq counterparts. The Council underscored that the team should operate with full respect for the sovereignty of Iraq. The investigators will help Iraq preserve any evidence that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed by Daesh.

- On September 19, UN Secretary-General António Guterres renewed his call on the authorities in Myanmar to take steps to address the Rohingya Muslims' crisis as the number of fleeing Muslims to Bangladesh surpasses 400,000.

During his address to the opening of the 72nd Session of the General Assembly's high-level general debate, Guterres said, "We are all shocked by the dramatic escalation of sectarian tensions in Myanmar's Rakhine state." He stressed that the authorities in Myanmar must end the military operations, allow unhindered humanitarian access and recognise the right of refugees to return in safety and dignity. He added that Myanmar authorities must also address the grievances of the Rohingya, whose status has been left unresolved for far too long. Marzuki Darusman, Chairperson of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, indicated that in addition to the over 400,000 people who have sought refuge in Bangladesh since August 25, 2017, there are reports that nearly 200 Rohingya villages in the affected area have been emptied. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is enhancing its operations, including moving new arrivals into family tents and temporary communal shelters at a new extension site next to the Kutupalong camp near Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

- On September 18, UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched a pledge of support for reforms in an effort to overhaul the United Nations to make it stronger and more responsive to the people.

The 10-point Declaration for support for UN reforms aims to simplify procedures and decentralise decisions, with greater transparency, efficiency and accountability. Guterres said, "Our shared objective is a 21st century UN, focused more on people and less on process, more on delivery and less on bureaucracy." He added that bureaucracy, fragmented structures, Byzantine procedures and endless red tape were the main reasons behind his worry. According to Guterres, during recent months, the UN embarked on plans to achieve gender parity among the Organisation's middle and senior-management positions, and is also working to reorganise the peace and security sections.

--- Moiz Khan