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Pakistan

- Prime Minister Imran Khan’s November 2 visit to China was an affirmation of the all weather friendship between the two countries. Khan held meetings with the Chinese leadership including, President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress Li Zhanshu. Both sides held an in-depth exchange of views on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. The two countries also agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, finance, science and technology, agriculture, education and other sectors and signed 15 important cooperation agreements in related fields.

- Reiterating Pakistan’s efforts to maintain friendly relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran on November 8, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi informed the Senate that Pakistan would not send its troops to Yemen to lend support to the Saudi-led forces. He also said Pakistan wants to play a mediatory role between the two countries.

- Earlier on November 4, a day after religio-political parties ended their protests against the Supreme Court’s landmark verdict in the Asia Bibi case after reaching an agreement with the government, Minister for Human Rights Dr Shireen Mazari cautioned against the dangers of “appeasing non-state actors”.

  Mazari tweeted, “Appeasement to avoid ‘bloodshed’ in a war-weary Europe led to massive bloodshed and destruction in the form of World War II.” She added, “Appeasement to ‘avoid bloodshed’ sends a dangerous message to non-state actors and undermines the very concept of democratic, peaceful protest.” The Minister however said she trusted Prime Minister Imran Khan to deliver on his commitments to the rule of law, Constitution and defence of state institutions, “as well as to human rights guaranteed in the Constitution — not just in the present situation, but also on issues like enforced disappearances.”

- Earlier on November 2, the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) agreed to end protests across the country after reaching an agreement with the government. According to the agreement, the government would not object to the review petition filed against the Supreme Court’s verdict in which Asiya Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death on charges of blasphemy was acquitted.
The UK’s Brexit Secretary Dominic Raab resigned on November 15, 2018 prompting six of his colleagues, including another Cabinet minister, to follow suit. Earlier on November 14, British Prime Minister Theresa May had announced that her Cabinet had agreed to the terms of a draft Brexit Deal.

Meanwhile the next hurdle for PM Theresa May would be to get the 585-page agreement through the British Parliament. The task seems insurmountable given the growing resentment within May’s own Cabinet. According to Brexiteers the text of the draft deal is a betrayal of the British people who voted for Brexit.

Amid the growing chaos in the UK, EU leaders warned on November 15 that the UK’s political situation could make a “no-deal” more likely.

On November 11, US President Donald Trump arrived in France as part of Armistice Day commemorations marking 100 years since the end of WWI. The ceremony led by French President Macron and where Trump had no role, highlighted the growing tension in the international arena. The French President spoke about the dangers of nationalism even as President Trump has talked about being a nationalist and also seeks to introduce new rules to replace those that have governed the world since the end of WWI. The US under Trump has abandoned several international agreements on trade, nuclear proliferation and climate change, and disparaged alliances including NATO and the EU.

The Euro Atlantic divide became more pronounced on November 14 after French President Emmanuel Macron’s spokesman accused US President Donald Trump of lacking “common decency” after Trump criticised his French counterpart in a series of tweets following his visit to Paris.

In another major setback for President Trump on the domestic front, on November 6 the Democrats took control of the House of Representatives. Notwithstanding Trump’s strategy of harnessing racial division and creating alarm about immigration he failed to lift his party. Trump may now have to tread carefully towards re-election in 2020, as several Midwestern states he won in 2016 threaten to slip away.

Earlier On November 5 the US imposed a package of severe economic penalties against Iran. The sanctions are the most significant part of President Trump’s decision in May 2018 to abandon the 2015 Iranian nuclear agreement. However, the penalties include some exceptions that could undermine their impact. Iran’s biggest petroleum customers, like China and India, will not be penalised, at least for six months.
• On November 9, a Taliban delegation along with representatives from 11 countries including the US, participated in the Moscow Summit to find ways for a political breakthrough in Afghanistan. Although the meeting could not yield a significant breakthrough, the presence of almost all stakeholders to the Afghan conflict highlights Russia's resurgence and growing influence in the region.

• On November 13, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) noted in its report that North Korea continues to work on its missile programme in violation of UN resolutions. Earlier on November 9, International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) Chief Yukia Amano said that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) continuing nuclear and missile programme was clearly in violation of Security Council resolutions.

• Amid the worsening situation in Yemen a group of US senators has released legislation on November 15 imposing sanctions, prohibitions and restrictions against Saudi Arabia and other entities considered responsible for the humanitarian suffering in war-torn Yemen. Earlier on November 2, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on the warring parties in Yemen and the international community to “halt the senseless cycle of violence” and “reach a political settlement to the Yemen conflict.”

---Amina Afzal
• On November 15, US President Donald Trump attacked Robert Mueller’s investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election, calling it a “total mess” and “absolutely nuts”.

He tweeted that investigators were “threatening” people to provide “the answers they want”. Trump said that no collusion between his election campaign and Russia had been found. He has also called the enquiry a “witch hunt”. Trump has previously said the special counsel investigation led by Mueller, who is a highly regarded former head of the FBI and a Republican, was unfair and dominated by “hardened Democrats”.

• On November 15, Brock Long, the Director of the US’ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) said that Paradise, the California town ravaged by wildfire will need a “total rebuild” job that could take several years.

Long said the damage to Paradise was “one of the worst disasters” he had ever seen. So far 56 people have been found dead in the Camp Fire that hit the town. Another 130 remain missing. About 9,400 firefighters are currently battling wildfires across the state. According to reports on November 13 at least 48 people have died since three wildfires began spreading in California. The Camp Fire, which is burning in Northern California, is now the largest and deadliest in the state’s history. Fires continue to rage on both ends of California, spreading and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. At least 23 are dead in the so-called Camp Fire, about 100 miles north of Sacramento, and two others have died in fires near Los Angeles. After 14 more bodies were discovered the Camp Fire surpassed the death toll in the 2017 Tubbs which killed 22 people and was the third-deadliest fire in the state’s history until now. The deadliest, the Griffith Park Fire in 1933, killed 29 people.

• According to NY Times on November 13, the Democratic Party has gained 33 seats and appears on track to gain between 35 and 40 once all the counting is complete.

Democratic losses in the Senate also look less serious than they did earlier. It now looks like Democrats are likely to lose a net of one or two seats, rather than three or four as predicted earlier. According to observers the underlying shifts in the electorate suggest President Trump may have to walk a precarious path to re-election in 2020, as several Midwestern states he won in 2016 threaten to slip away, and once-red states in the Southwest turn a “purpler hue.” The President’s strategy of sowing racial division and stoking alarm about immigration failed to lift his party, and Democratic messaging about health care undercut the benefit Republicans hoped to gain from a strong economy.
- Republicans suffered another setback in California on November 13 as Representative Jeff Denham was ousted after four terms in office.

His Democratic challenger, Josh Harder, defeated Denham. Harder’s lead had grown over the last week, and the latest update showed him 4,919 votes ahead, a margin that Denham would not be able to make up. Harder’s victory is the latest sign of Democratic strength in California and the country. The Democrats set out to unseat up to seven Republicans in California in districts that Hillary Clinton carried in 2016 but where registered Republicans outnumbered registered Democrats.

- On November 12 Judge Amy Totenberg of Federal District Court in Atlanta ordered a delay in the certification of Georgia’s election results, citing concerns about the state’s voter registration system and the handling of provisional ballots.

The decision has further deepened the turmoil in Georgia’s campaign for governor. The “unsettled contest” has been among the most acrimonious campaigns in the country. Although the ruling formally affected every election in Georgia for state and federal office, it reverberated most immediately and powerfully through the governor’s race, in which the Democratic candidate, Stacey Abrams, was within 21,000 votes of forcing a runoff election against Brian Kemp, the Republican nominee. Georgia’s Secretary of State, Robyn A. Crittenden, had been preparing to certify the outcome of the election a day after Georgia’s 159 counties were to complete their tabulations and six days before state law mandated certification. In the ruling Judge Totenberg forbade Crittenden, from certifying the results.

- According to the *NY Times* on November 9 Judge Brian Morris of United States District Court for Montana issued a repudiation of President Trump’s decision to allow the disputed Keystone XL oil pipeline to proceed.

According to the judgement the administration failed to present a “reasoned explanation” for the move and also “discarded” the effect the project would have on climate change. The decision could create new legal hassles for the White House pertaining to climate change. President Trump has elevated the pipeline as a prominent symbol of his administration’s effort to encourage fossil fuel use. Criticising the decision he said, “It was a political decision made by a judge,” and also, “I think it’s a disgrace.” The ruling blocked construction on the 1,179-mile pipeline, which would carry 800,000 barrels a day of petroleum from the Canadian oil sands to the Gulf Coast.

- On November 8, protesters marched in New York and other cities across the country to protect the investigation led by special Counsel Robert S. Mueller.
Groups across the nation marched to support the inquiry of Robert S. Mueller III, and also to protest acting Attorney General, Matthew G. Whitaker’s appointment. Thousands demonstrated in dozens of cities, including in Washington, Philadelphia, Omaha and Salt Lake City. In New York, about 4,000 people marched. Protesters held signs and chanted “Trump is not above the law.” On Twitter, #ProtectMueller was trending.

- On November 8, a federal appeals court upheld a nationwide injunction against the Trump Administration’s attempt to revoke deportation protections for some 700,000 young “Dreamers”.

The so called Dreamers were brought into the United States illegally as children. Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions had announced in September 2017 that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme would end gradually over six months, prompting legal challenges and protests. Trump has criticised DACA, as an “amnesty-first approach,” and said that President Barack Obama had overstepped his authority by introducing it. The ruling from the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, was the first time that a federal circuit court had weighed in at this stage on one of the country’s most contentious immigration issues. It brought DACA closer to review by the United States Supreme Court, which ultimately will have to resolve the various legal claims around the programme.

- On November 7 at least 12 people were killed in a shooting at a bar in Thousand Oaks, California.

The attack is the latest in a wave of mass shootings that have occurred in 2018. A man opened fire at a Pittsburgh synagogue in October 2018 killing 11 people in an attack that officials said was motivated by anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant rage. Americans make up about 4.4 percent of the global population but own 42 percent of the world’s guns. From 1966 to 2012, 31 percent of the gunmen in mass shootings worldwide were American, according to a 2015 study by Adam Lankford a Professor at the University of Alabama.

- On November 6 the Democrats took control of the House of Representatives.

The party added several women to its ranks. Democrats now have the power to investigate President Trump. The Republicans however maintained their Senate majority by claiming several conservative-leaning seats. Republican governors were elected in Ohio and Florida, two important battlegrounds in Trump’s 2020 campaign calculations. Democrats beat Gov. Scott Walker, the Wisconsin Republican and a top target, and captured the governor’s office in Michigan — two states that Trump carried in 2016. The democrats won at least 26 seats based on their support in suburban and metropolitan districts that were once bulwarks of Republican power but where voters have recoiled from the president’s demagoguery on race.
• On November 5 President Trump closed the midterm election campaign.

According to observers the campaign was built “on dark themes of fear, nationalism and racial animosity” in an effort to maintain Republican control of Congress for the remaining two years of Trump’s term. “His campaigning produced what may be the most polarised midterm contest in modern times as he played to tribal rifts in American society in a way that no president has done since before the civil rights era. The voters will choose a new House, decide one-third of the seats in the Senate and select new governors for battleground states that will be critical to the 2020 presidential campaign. On the line for the president will be his ability to legislate, build his promised border wall, appoint new judges and ultimately set the stage to run for a second term.

International

• According to the Washington Post on November 15, a bipartisan group of senators is releasing legislation imposing sanctions, prohibitions and restrictions against Saudi Arabia and other entities considered responsible for the humanitarian suffering in war-torn Yemen.

The sanctions are the most punitive yet to emerge from Congress since Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s murder in October 2018. The group led by Senators Robert Menendez (Democrat-NJ) and Todd C. Young (Republican-Indiana) also includes Trump confidant Lindsey O. Graham (Republican-SC). They are calling for a total prohibition on arms sales to Saudi Arabia that could be used for offensive purposes. The all encompassing embargo includes a ban on selling Riyadh munitions, bombs, missiles, aircraft, tanks or armoured vehicles, according to a person familiar with the text, but does not prevent the sale of purely defensive systems, such as missile interceptors. The measure would also codify the Trump Administration’s recent decision to stop refueling Saudi planes engaged in operations in Yemen against the Houthi rebels and impose sanctions on anyone supporting the Houthi rebellion namely, Iran within 30 days of the bill’s passage. Those who prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid to Yemeni civilians would also be subject to new proposed sanctions in the bill that would go into effect immediately.

• On November 5 the US imposed a package of severe economic penalties against Iran.

According to the Trump Administration it is “biggest sanction action” the United States has ever undertaken against Iran. The Iranian President termed it an act of economic war. The severe economic penalties imposed against Iran are the most significant part of President Trump’s decision in May 2018 to abandon the 2015 Iranian nuclear agreement. However, the penalties include some exceptions that could undermine their impact. Iran’s biggest petroleum customers,
like China and India, will not be penalised, at least for six months. Iran’s oil, shipping and banking industries could take a significant hit and its weakened currency could plunge further under the sanctions. President Trump has said the sanctions are intended to stop what he considers Iran’s unacceptable actions in the Middle East.

- In a November 1 speech President Trump stepped up his efforts to promote a vision of a United States that would be better off with fewer immigrants.

Trump assailed Democrats, and criticised the caravan of Central Americans making their way through Mexico. He said he had ordered troops to respond to any migrants in the caravan who throw rocks as if they were brandishing firearms. He said, “I told them Consider it a rifle.” He said his government had already begun to construct “massive cities of tents” to imprison legal and illegal immigrants who try to enter the United States. According to observers the President’s anti-immigrant message is aimed at stoking fear and motivating voters to reject Democrats. Immigration has been a significant issue for the Trump Presidency, and has resurfaced with the possibility that Republicans could face significant losses in the midterm elections.

Latin America

- On November 14 hundreds of migrants in the caravan traveling from Central America started arriving in the northern Mexico border city of Tijuana.

The arrival could lead to a potential confrontation with US authorities. Their arrival signals the start of another to get across that border, something that President Trump has promised to impede, even for those seeking asylum. Trump has labeled the caravan an invasion, has deployed US soldiers to the border and made changes to asylum rules in an effort to confront it. About 800 migrants associated with the caravan have made it to Tijuana so far, according to local officials and advocates, with thousands more still crossing Mexico and expected to arrive in the next several days.

---Amina Afzal
ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- According to CNN on November 13, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) noted in its report that North Korea continues to work on its missile programme in violation of UN resolutions.

The report has provided information on thirteen out of an estimated twenty North Korean missile operating bases not declared by the North Korean government. The findings of the report are based on commercial satellite imagery. The report stated, “These missile operating bases, which can be used for all classes of ballistic missile from short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) up to intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), would presumably have to be subject to declaration, verification, and dismantlement in any final and fully verifiable denuclearisation deal.” The report indicated that the sites were not launch facilities and in some cases were rudimentary. It also suggests that the sites sought to conceal and maximise the survival of its missile units from pre-emptive strikes and during wartime operations. Though the findings of the report are a source of concern, North Korea has not violated its statements or terms of declarations made during the country’s meetings with South Korea and the US. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un had not agreed to halt either nuclear weapons or missile development in negotiations with US President Donald Trump or Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. On November 13, 2018, an official with South Korea’s Blue House called the report “nothing new.” The official said, “The US and South Korean intelligence service hold more detailed information using the military satellites, and that nuclear sites could not be undeclared as there had been no agreement with North Korea to declare them.” He also said that there were no negotiations or an agreement with North Korea mandating the country to close its missile bases.

- On November 8, the First Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted three draft resolutions proposed by Pakistan.

The First Committee approved the resolutions during the 73rd Session of the UNGA, with overwhelming support. However, India was the sole country to vote against the resolutions. According to Pakistan’s Ambassador to the UN, Maleeha Lodhi, the draft resolutions focused on Regional Disarmament (A/C.1/73/L.5), Conventional Arms Control at Regional and Sub-Regional Levels (A/C.1/73/L.6) and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in the Regional and Sub-Regional Context (A/C.1/73/L.7). While describing the adoption of these draft resolutions as acknowledgement of Pakistan’s commitment to promote the objectives of regional and global disarmament, Ambassador Lodhi said that these draft resolutions represented the country’s contribution to furthering the goals of regional and global disarmament within the framework of the UN. The draft resolution on “Conventional Arms Control at Regional and Sub-Regional Levels,” would require the UNGA to give urgent consideration to the issues involved in conventional arms control at regional and sub-regional levels, while recognising the importance of representation of women in arms control negotiations on equitable terms. Under the terms of
the resolution, the UNGA would also request the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to consider
the formulation of principles that can serve as a framework for regional agreements on
conventional arms control, and looks forward to a report of the Conference on the subject.

Earlier, on November 1, 2018, the First Committee also adopted a Pakistan-sponsored draft
resolution, titled: “Conclusion of Effective International Arrangements to Assure Non-Nuclear-
Weapon States Against the Use or Threat of Use of Nuclear Weapons.” The resolution required
the UNGA to recommend that the CD actively continue intensive negotiations with a view to
reaching early agreement and concluding effective international agreements to assure non-
nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of these armaments. It was adopted by a
vote of 122 in favour to none against, with 65 abstentions.

The First Committee of the UNGA deals with disarmament, global challenges and threats to
peace that affect the international community and seeks solutions to the challenges in the
international security regime.

- On November 12, India formally inducted two different types of howitzers including the
  BAE Systems 155 mm/39-calibre M777A towed lightweight howitzer and the K-9 Vajra
  (Thunderbolt) howitzer.

India inducted three M777A howitzers, with another two set to be delivered shortly as part of the
first batch of 25 guns. India has ordered 145 guns worth $737 million, which would be built at
the BAE Systems Assembly, Integration and Training (AIT) facility in collaboration with
Mahindra Defence. The remaining 120 of total of 145 guns would be completely delivered by
2021. The Indian Army also inducted 10 K-9 Vajra howitzers. The country took delivery of 10 of
the 100 K-9s during a ceremony presided over by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on
November 9, 2018, at the Artillery Centre at Deolali in western India. The order for 100
howitzers worth $600 million was placed to a local manufacturer Larsen & Toubro (L&T) in
2016. The Ministry of Defence indicated that the remaining 90 howitzers would be delivered by
November 2020, with the first K-9 regiment set to become operational by July 2019.

- According to Reuters on November 10, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani claimed that
  new US sanctions on Iran’s oil did not affect the country.

- On November 5, US formally imposed punitive sanctions on Iran and granted eight
countries temporary waivers allowing them to keep buying oil from the country.

US President Donald Trump said he was imposing sanctions on Iran’s oil gradually, and he did
not want to shock energy markets and causing global price spikes. The sanctions are part of
President Trump’s effort to curb Iran’s missile and nuclear programmes and diminish the
country’s regional role. Following the US’ withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of
Action (JCPOA), Trump had announced in May 2018 that the US would re-impose sanctions on
Iran that had been waived as part of the accord. Trump Administration officials have said the
The aim of the sanctions was to stop all Iran’s oil exports. In August, 2018, the first-round of sanctions targeted Iran’s aviation industry, currency and even carpets, while the second-round of sanctions are aimed at Iran’s economy and oil. They also target shipping, banks, and financial entities that enable Iran’s oil trade. The US has also granted exemptions to China, India, Greece, Italy, Taiwan, Japan, Turkey and South Korea, allowing them to continue buying Iranian oil temporarily. However, it is unclear how long the waivers would last. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the waivers were granted to ensure oil prices are not destabilised if supply from Iran is abruptly removed from the international market. In response, Iran condemned new US sanctions on November 5, 2018, and said that it would break the sanctions and continue to sell oil abroad. On November 10, 2018, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani claimed that US sanctions have had no effect on Iran’s economy. He said, “The sanctions have had no impact on our economy because America had already used all the weapons at its disposal and there was nothing new to use against us.” He also stressed that it had become clear that the US could not cut Iran’s oil exports to zero.

- On November 9, International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) Chief Yukia Amano said that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) continuing nuclear and missile programme was clearly in violation of Security Council resolutions. While briefing the UN General Assembly, Amano said, “I again call upon the DPRK to comply fully with its obligations under relevant resolutions of the Security Council and of the IAEA Board of Governors, to cooperate promptly with the Agency and to resolve all outstanding issues.” He also said the IAEA was ready to assist in verifying the DPRK’s denuclearisation if a political agreement reached among countries concerned. Regarding Iran’s nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Amano said, “Iran is implementing its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA.”

- On November 5, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India’s first indigenous nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), the INS Arihant, has successfully completed its first deterrence patrol. PM Modi made the announcement following the return of the INS Arihant from its maiden deterrence patrol. In his comments on India’s secret Advanced Technology Vessel, Modi said, “Today is historic because it marks the completing of the successful establishment of the nuclear triad. India’s nuclear triad will be an important pillar of global peace and stability.” He called the successful patrol of the INS Arihant a “fitting response to those who indulge in nuclear blackmail.” He said, “Arihant is an open warning for the country’s enemies, for the foes of peace: do not try any misadventure against India.” The induction of the INS Arihant into service completes India’s nuclear triad by adding maritime nuclear strike capability to land and air-based delivery platforms. The 6,000-tonne Arihant was commissioned in 2016. The submarine is the lead boat of a fleet of four to five planned SSBNs and is based on the Russian Project 971 Akula I-class submarine. It is capable to be armed with 12 K-15 or 4 K-4 submarine-launched
ballistic missiles (SLBM) have ranges of 750 or 3500 kilometres respectively. The second Arihant-class submarine, the INS Arighat, was secretly launched in 2017 and is likely to join the naval fleet in 2021. The Indian government did not give operational details about the INS Arihant’s deterrent patrol, nor did it provide any information regarding deployment of SLBMs or whether the missiles were mated with nuclear weapons. However, Admiral Arun Prakash, a former navy chief, told ‘The Hindu’ that the submarine was fully operational and the missiles were loaded. He also said, “It will stay on continuous deterrence patrols and when the signal goes out from New Delhi to INS Arihant, it should be able to launch a nuclear missile.” Technically, the ‘deterrent patrol’ itself refers to a situation when the submarine is fully operational and is armed with SLBMs. In this case, the INS Arihant could be armed with K-15 SLBMs, because the missile was inducted and successfully launched from the submarine in August 2018.

In response, Pakistan’s Foreign Office Spokesperson Dr Mohammad Faisal said on November 8, 2018, that “Pakistan has taken notice of a first deterrence patrol” of an Indian nuclear submarine and subsequent “self-congratulatory messages in India.” He said, “The development marks the first actual deployment of ready-to-fire nuclear warheads in South Asia which is a matter of concern not only for the Indian Ocean littoral states but also for the international community at large.” While calling the development harmful for the regional strategic stability, Dr Faisal said that Pakistan was committed to maintaining strategic stability in South Asia and the country believes that the only way forward for both India and Pakistan was to agree on measures for nuclear and missile restraints. However, he also warned, “At the same time no one should be in doubt about Pakistan’s resolve and capabilities to meet the challenges posed by the latest developments both in the nuclear and conventional realms in South Asia.”

In a related development on November 9, 2018, Pakistan’s Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), Gen Zubair Hayat, said in response to the INS Arihant’s deterrent patrol that strategic stability with India would be restored and credibility of the Pakistan’s deterrence capability would be ensured. “We have and we will continue to provide necessary response to ensure that strategic balance is maintained and Pakistan’s deterrence remains credible. Let there be no doubt on that account.” Gen Zubair called the development as India’s maintenance of its “long-standing tradition of introducing new instruments of instability with which it can attempt eroding deterrence stability in the region.” The CJCSC also indicated that the world powers were providing India with exceptional access to high technology which helps the countries in its unprecedented military build-up.

On November 6, 2018, Adviser to Pakistan’s National Command Authority (NCA) retired Lt Gen Khalid Kidwai also stressed that Pakistan would continue to seek to redress the imbalances caused by Indian measures. Speaking in the context of India-Russia deal for S-400 air defence systems, Kidwai said that calling India’s procurement of the system a ‘game changer’ was wrong, and Pakistan would not follow India’s suit in developing a defence system against ballistic missiles. He said, “Pakistan remains unfazed and as before, we have adequate response.
options which will disallow any disturbance of the strategic balance or strategic stability. That fundamental policy will prevail.”

- On November 3, Iranian Defence Minister Amir Hatami said that Iran started production of the locally-designed Kowsar fighter plane for use in its air force.

During the launch ceremony of the plane, Minister Hatami said, “Soon the needed number of this plane will be produced and put at the service of the air force.” According to media reports, Iran claims that the Kowsar aircraft is indigenously developed and is capable of carrying various weapons and is to be used for short aerial support missions. However, some military experts believe that the aircraft is a refurbished copy an F-5 first produced in the US in the 1960s.

--- Moiz Khan
China

- On November 15, Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang met Russian President, Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Singapore.

During the talks, both leaders appreciated an expansion of mutual ties. The Russian President urged regular high-level communication between the countries. The Chinese Premier noted that the China-Russia strategic partnership has been functioning positively at high administration levels and called for added investment opportunities and a reduction of trade restrictions.

- On November 14, Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying said that China has never threatened Europe.

The remarks came in the wake of a suggestion by French President Emmanuel Macron for building a military force to defend Europe against the US, China and Russia. Chunying, however, said that Europe has the right to decide its own foreign and defence policies. The Chinese Foreign Ministry said that European leaders have expressed a desire for closer cooperation with China.

- According to Reuters on November 1, US Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo said that the US was engaged in a “multi-pronged effort to convince China to behave like a normal nation on commerce” and respect international law.

The remarks came after Washington indicted 10 Chinese nationals for stealing its aviation secrets. Pompeo called China’s behaviour in stealing intellectual property “inappropriate” and “not consistent with being a superpower or a leader in the world.” Meanwhile, the US has intensified pressure campaign against Beijing by accusing China of reckless military actions in the South China Sea. China rejected the allegations.

Japan

- On November 14, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Singapore.

Abe and Putin agreed that they would accelerate peace treaty talks based on a 1956 joint declaration with the former Soviet Union in which Moscow pledged to hand over two of the four islands to Tokyo following a formal peace treaty between the two countries. Japan has long insisted that its sovereignty over all four islands must be confirmed prior to the signing of a peace treaty with Russia.
**Myanmar**

- On November 14, US Vice President Mike Pence met with Myanmar’s leader, Aung San Suu Kyi in Singapore.

*During the meeting, Pence voiced the Trump Administration’s strongest condemnation of Myanmar’s treatment of Rohingya’s Muslims. He told Suu Kyi that “persecution” by Myanmar’s army was “without excuse”. The Myanmar Army launched a sweeping offensive against Rohingya’s Muslims in Rakhine state in August 2017. Myanmar denies persecuting members of the Muslim minority, saying its forces have carried out legitimate counterinsurgency operations.*

- In a related development on November 14, *Reuters* reported that Amnesty International withdrew its most prestigious human rights prize from Aung San Suu Kyi, accusing her of perpetuating human rights abuses by not speaking out about violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority.

Amnesty said that Suu Kyi has “shielded the security forces from accountability” for the violence against the Rohingya, describing it a “shameful betrayal of the values she once stood for.” Suu Kyi has been stripped of a series of international honours over the Rohingya’s killings that began in August 2017.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer
On November 15, EU leaders dismissed talk of renegotiating the draft Brexit deal and warned the UK’s political situation could make a “no-deal” more likely. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said there was “no question” of reopening talks as a document was “on the table”. Meanwhile French PM Edouard Philippe said there was a need to prepare for a no-deal because of UK “uncertainty”. The EU has set out a series of meetings leading up to November 25, 2018 when it plans to approve the Brexit agreement. However, leaders admit that there is still much ground to cover after the UK Prime Minister Theresa May won backing from her cabinet for the 585-page draft agreement. “We still have a long road ahead of us on both sides,” the EU’s Chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said. Barnier will meet EU Council head Donald Tusk on November 16, 2018 to formally tell him that the negotiations were successful and also that a summit can now be held leading to the signing of the Brexit withdrawal agreement. Barnier will then head to Strasbourg to brief the European Parliament whose approval of the agreement will ultimately be needed before the UK leaves the EU next March. The leaders of the other 27 EU nations will also need to approve the deal.

On November 15 British Prime Minister Theresa May faced MPs over the draft Brexit agreement the UK has reached with the EU. Although May was able to secure her cabinet’s backing for the deal, Brexit Secretary Dominic Raab has resigned over it. Raab said he quit the cabinet over “fatal flaws” in the draft Brexit agreement with the EU. He also said the UK should be ready to risk a no-deal Brexit in the face of EU “blackmail”. Another cabinet minister, Esther McVey, also quit alongside junior ministers Suella Braverman and Shailesh Vara. May faced nearly three hours of largely hostile questions in the Commons and could potentially face a vote of no confidence from Tory MPs. Labour will announce later whether or not it will back the deal. However, leader Jeremy Corbyn said he did not believe the agreement was in the national interest.

During an emergency meeting on November 14, British Prime Minister Theresa May’s cabinet approved a draft agreement on the country’s withdrawal from the EU. Cabinet support relieves some of the pressure on May, who has struggled for months to meet competing demands over the withdrawal, commonly known as Brexit, which is scheduled to occur on March 29, 2019. “The choices before us were difficult, particularly in relation to northern Ireland backstop, but the collective decision of Cabinet was that government should agree the draft withdrawal agreement and the outline political declaration,” she said in a short statement. “This is a decisive step.”
On November 13, British and EU officials reached a long-awaited draft agreement on Britain’s withdrawal from the bloc.

The agreement opens the way for a high-level meeting of Prime Minister Theresa May’s most senior ministers to consider the plans. Cabinet ministers will have a chance to review the draft text ahead of a critical meeting of the full cabinet. After months of deadlock over the terms of Brexit, the presentation of the draft agreement is a moment of truth for Mrs. May, who is desperate to avoid a chaotic and disorderly “no-deal” Brexit. But she cannot be assured of support from hard-line Brexiteers in her cabinet, whom she may need to face down. In the worst case, defections from the cabinet or an outright rejection of the pact could threaten her leadership.

According to France on November 14, US President Donald Trump’s tweets mocking his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron were inappropriate and showed a lack of “common decency.”

On November 13, Trump attacked Macron over nationalism, plans for a European army and the French leader's ratings. “We were marking the murder of 130 of our people,” French government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux said, referring to the 2015 Paris attacks. “So I will reply in English ‘common decency’ would have been the appropriate thing,” he said.

According to the BBC on November 14 the Italian government has defied the European Commission by sticking to its big-spending budget plan.

Finance Minister Giovanni Tria said it would keep to a deficit target of 2.4% and a growth forecast of 1.5%. Worried by the impact of high spending on Italy’s high levels of debt, the Commission had told Rome to revise the budget or face possible fines. It had set November 13, 2018 as a deadline to Italy’s governing populist parties to respond to its objections. The Commission’s warning to Italy is an unprecedented move with regard to an EU member state. It will now decide whether to begin disciplinary measures against the Rome government.

French President Emmanuel Macron launched the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace on November 12 at the UNESCO Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

The high-level declaration on developing common principles for securing cyberspace has already received the backing of many States, as well as private companies and civil society organisations. Supporters of the Paris Call are committed to working together to increase prevention against and resilience to malicious online activity; protect the accessibility and integrity of the Internet; cooperate in order to prevent interference in electoral processes; work together to combat intellectual property violations via the Internet; prevent the proliferation of
malicious online programmes and techniques; improve the security of digital products and services as well as everybody’s “cyber hygiene”; clamp down on online mercenary activities and offensive action by non-state actors; work together to strengthen the relevant international standards.

- According to Amnesty International on November 12, EU member states’ policies to curb migration, and their failure to provide sufficient resettlement places for refugees, continue to fuel a cycle of abuse for migrants.

EU policies have trapped thousands of migrants and refugees in appalling conditions in Libyan detention centres. Migrants and refugees in Libyan detention centres are routinely exposed to torture, extortion and rape. “One year after video footage showing human beings being bought and sold like merchandise shocked the world, the situation for refugees and migrants in Libya remains bleak,” said Heba Morayef, Middle East and North Africa Director for Amnesty International. “Cruel policies by EU states to stop people arriving on European shores, coupled with their woefully insufficient support to help refugees reach safety through regular routes, means that thousands of men, women and children are trapped in Libya facing horrific abuses with no way out.”

- On November 11 dozens of world leaders marched down the Champs-Élysées to commemorate the anniversary of the armistice that ended World War I.

After the leaders reached the Arc de Triomphe by foot, President Trump arrived protected from the rain as he made an individual entrance. Russian President Vladimir V. Putin also followed suit. Although Trump’s separate arrival was attributed to security concerns “it felt apt that these two leaders would not arrive with the crowd. No one has done more to break up the postwar global system in the last couple of years than Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin.” French President Emmanuel Macron rebuked Trump’s brand of “America First” nationalism when he spoke about the dangers of nationalism. President Trump recently called himself a nationalist.

- On November 11 huge crowds celebrated the centenary of Poland’s independence, amid controversy over a decision to include far-right groups.

Led by President Andrzej Duda, nationalists were among more than 200,000 people taking part in a march in Warsaw. Opposition parties boycotted the event. The march came as French President Emmanuel Macron urged world leaders to reject nationalism. Poland’s National Independence Day commemorates the restoration of the country’s sovereignty from the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian empires in 1918. Most participants in the march were seen carrying Polish flags and wearing red-and-white armbands, but some were holding banners representing far-right parties from Poland and Italy.
• Commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Nazi Kristallnacht attack on Germany’s Jews on November 9, French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe reported a 69% increase in anti-Semitic incidents in 2018.

“We are a very far cry from ridding ourselves of anti-Semitism,” he said, calling on France not to remain indifferent to a “relentless” rise. The 1938 night of broken glass produced an orgy of violence against Jews. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she lacked the words to describe it. During a speech in Berlin’s Rykestrasse synagogue, she said the pogrom night of 9 November led to the Holocaust, and yet anti-Semitism still flourished in public and online. “We have sadly almost become accustomed to the fact that every synagogue, Jewish school, kindergarten, restaurant and cemetery needs to be either guarded by police or given special protection,” she said. Both the Chancellor and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier described Kristallnacht as a “rupture” in German civilisation.

• On November 6, French President Emmanuel Macron warned that Europeans cannot be protected without a “true, European army”.

During a visit to the former Western Front in Verdun, he said Russia had shown it could be a threat and Europe had to be able “to defend itself better alone”. Russian President Vladimir Putin will be among world leaders marking the Armistice of World War I in Paris. Macron has already proposed a joint intervention force for crisis missions. German Chancellor Angela Merkel also supported the idea of an intervention force in June 2018, but said it would have to be part of “the structure of defence co-operation”. The UK, while in favour of such a joint force, is opposed to a European army, because of the potential risk of creating a parallel structure to NATO. Macron has already warned that Europeans can no longer rely on the US to defend them, and he revived the theme in response to President Donald Trump's decision to pull out of a 1987 nuclear treaty with Russia, banning medium-range ground-launched missiles.

• On November 5 the Irish prime minister once again dismissed the idea of a time-limited backstop after Brexit.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said he “can’t countenance” the idea of an expiry date and also that such a deal would not be “worth the paper it’s written on”. His comments follow reports that the UK wants the unilateral right to end the backstop with three months' notice. The backstop is an arrangement that applies if the Irish border cannot be kept frictionless as part of a deal.

• On November 3, the Irish Prime Minister said Brexit was fraying relations between Ireland and Britain.
Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said it had also “undermined” the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). The GFA was signed by political parties in Northern Ireland in 1998 and was aimed at establishing peace after 30 years of The Troubles. The UK government says “nothing we agree with the EU will risk a return to a hard border”. The Irish border is one of the biggest sticking points in the Brexit negotiations.

- On November 2 storms across Italy claimed five more lives.

At least 12 people died earlier in the week as strong winds buffeted large areas of Italy’s north and west. Falling trees killed many victims. The worst-affected areas were in the far north, particularly Trentino and Veneto, where schools had to close. Mudslides closed a key road in the Dolomites, as it emerged that the winds had torn down a fabled spruce forest. Some of the worst damage was to roads around Belluno, after five days of storms had dislodged mud, rocks and water.

---Amina Afzal
GLOBAL TERRORISM

- On November 15, India and the EU agreed to step up cooperation in effectively dealing with terrorism, extremism and radicalisation.

In a statement issued by the EU, the two parties focused their discussions on the terrorist threats in Europe, South Asia and the Middle East. They emphasised on the importance of continuing the progress made in defeating Daesh. They also agreed to find ways to enhance cooperation to counter violent extremism and radicalisation including chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. Issues including tackling terrorist use of internet and counter terrorism financing were also discussed.

- On November 13, the US State Department designated Jawad Nasrallah, son of Lebanon’s Iran-backed Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, a global terrorist and accused him of carrying out attacks against Israel in the West Bank.

In a statement, the State Department also blacklisted Al-Mujahidin Brigades (AMB), which it said had links to Hezbollah and had plotted a number of attacks against Israeli targets from a base in the Palestinian Territories. The department’s top counter-terrorism official Nathan Sales said that more sanctions would be announced later on.

- On November 12, Federica Mogherini, Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, held talks with Algeria as part of the second Algeria-EU High-Level Dialogue on Regional Security and Counterterrorism.

Foreign Minister of Algeria Abdelkader Messahel and Mogherini co-chaired the work of the dialogue. The two parties discussed terrorist threats and their connection to cross-border organised-crime and means of deepening their cooperation in the area. Messahel shared the Algerian viewpoint in terms of solving conflicts and crisis hitting several countries in the region including Libya and Mali. He further urged the EU to support Algeria’s efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region. According to Mogherini, the European bloc and the North African nation face common challenges as they are required to work together to face them. According to the European executive body, the two parties discussed bilateral partnership to deepen cooperation in various fields, diversify the economy, migration and transportation. The EU and Algeria have agreed on partnership priorities for the period of 2018-2020, with political dialogue, and comprehensive social and economic development as the focus.

- On November 9, a man set a car on fire and stabbed three people in Melbourne, Australia.
According to Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton, the incident is being treated as a terrorist attack. The Daesh also took responsibility for the attack on Amaq News Agency. The attacker was shot by the police after stabbing three people in Melbourne’s Bourke Street. The authorities knew the attacker indirectly. He has relatives that are persons of interest to the federal intelligence.

- On November 9, Vladimir Voronkov, Head of UNOCT called on the heads of national counter-terrorism agencies to step up multilateral cooperation.

While speaking at the XVII Meeting of Heads of Special Services, Security Agencies, and Law-Enforcement Organisations, Voronkov emphasised on the importance of exchanging information, technical expertise and disseminating best practices at the operational level. He also stressed on the urgent need to enhance dialogue and coordination among counter-terrorism professionals. He asked the participants of the meeting to step up a multilateral cooperation involving relevant government agencies, civil society, the private sector and multilateral organisations. Vladimir Voronkov and Valery Semerikov, Acting Secretary-General of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen collaboration between UNOCT and CSTO and promote the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

- On November 7, the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact brought together 40 UN agencies to fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

In a statement, Vladimir Voronkov, head of UNOCT said that the implementation of bringing 40 UN agencies together to fight terrorism would make it possible to ensure more balanced, well-coordinated actions within the UN and increase efficiency of counter-terrorism activities. He also said, resources and funds were stretched too thin and in order to prevent that everything should be brought together to create an effective mechanism. Voronkov emphasised on working together and not politicising the agenda as the threat of terrorism needs to be fought every single day. He concluded by saying, “This global counter-action should be totally practical and free of political discussions on what is better and what s worse, we need just to fight terrorism every single day.”

- On November 2, head of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, called for regional cooperation across national boundaries at a conference of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Uzbekistan.

Voronkov spoke at the Sixth Scientific Conference of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (CSO RATS) entitled “Combating Terrorism – Cooperation
without Boundaries.” In his statement, he said that regional cooperation across national boundaries was essential to counter the evolving threat of terrorism. He praised the SCO RATS for “leading the way in facilitating the exchange of intelligence, implementing joint investigations and carrying out anti-terrorism exercises of Member States”. He also commended the collaboration between SCO RATS and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT), the capacity building arm of UNOCT, on the Joint Plan of Action for the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia. Voronkov signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Novikov, head of the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Centre to strengthen cooperation, coordination and promote the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism.

---Rimsha Zulfiqar
Bahrain

- On November 4, Bahrain sentenced Sheikh Ali Salman, head of the country’s Shia opposition movement, to life in prison for spying for Qatar.

Salman headed the now-banned Al-Wefaq movement, and two of his aides had been acquitted by the high criminal court in June 2018. The public prosecutor said in a statement that the three had been unanimously sentenced by the appeals court for “acts of hostility” against Bahrain and “communicating with Qatari officials to overthrow constitutional order.” Bahrain, along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, severed all ties with Qatar in 2017, banning their citizens from traveling to or communication with the country over its alleged ties to both Iran and radical groups. Opposition movements, both religious and secular, have been outlawed since 2011 and hundreds of dissidents have been imprisoned. Many of them have also been stripped of their citizenship in the process.

Egypt

- On November 2, at least 7 people were killed and 14 injured when gunmen attacked a bus carrying Coptic Christians in central Egypt.

The attackers opened fire on the bus in the Minya province. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the shooting. In recent years, Daesh has been repeatedly targeting Copts, a Christian minority that make up 10% of Egypt’s 96 million people. Daesh had killed more than 40 people in twin church bombings in April 2017 and a month later shot dead 28 Christians in Minya province as they headed to a monastery on a bus. Egypt’s government imposed a countrywide three-month state of emergency after the April 2017 church bombings. In February 2018, the Egyptian Army launched a major offensive against Daesh in the Sinai Peninsula, where the group has waged a deadly insurgency since the fall of President Mohammed Morsi in 2013.

Iraq

- On November 11, Iraqi President Barham Salih visited Kuwait and held talks with Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah.

The Iraqi delegation included the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Industry, the Director of the Intelligence and the Governor of Basra. In a statement, the Kuwaiti Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah said the talks dealt with bilateral relations and ways to strengthen cooperation in various fields. During a press briefing, President Salih said it is in his country’s best interests to have “good and stable relations” with Iran, urging the US to
consider Baghdad’s political and economic position in talks about imposed sanctions on Iran. He said, “We do not want Iraq to be burdened with the US sanctions on Iran.” Salih also emphasised that his country wanted to maintain “balanced” relations with all its neighbours and the international community.

• According to Press Tv on November 7, Iraqi security forces found a mass grave in the country’s northern province of Nineveh that contains the remains of a number of former parliamentary candidates believed to have been executed by Daesh.

According to Army Captain Karim al-Obeidi, federal police forces had made the discovery in the village of Badush, some 15 kilometres northwest of Mosul. He also said that authorities had so far recovered the bodies of more than 30 people from the grave. Obeidi said, “Those candidates had been kidnapped by Daesh after it overran Mosul in 2014.” According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), more than 200 mass graves, containing the remains of thousands of people, have been discovered in territories previously controlled by Daesh in Iraq. It also noted that there maybe more mass graves, and it is difficult to determine the total number of people in the graves.

Israel

• On November 14, Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman announced his resignation and called for early elections after a sharp disagreement over the Gaza ceasefire deal.

• On November 13, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups accepted an Egypt-mediated agreement to halt two days of intense fighting with Israel.

Lieberman also said his party was quitting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalition, leaving the Premier with only one-seat majority in parliament. Elections are not due until November 2019; however, Lieberman’s resignation increases the likelihood of an early election. While explaining his reasons for resigning, Lieberman said, “What happened yesterday, the truce combined with the process with Hamas, is capitulating to terror. What we are doing now as a state is buying short-term quiet, with the price being severe long-term damage to national security.” Lieberman said that he also vehemently objected to Israel’s allowing Qatar to deliver $15 million to the Gaza Strip to pay the salaries of government workers and civil servant. Netanyahu has defended the ceasefire deal that ended the worst escalation between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza since a 2014 war. An official from Netanyahu’s Likud party responded to speculation that early elections would be called and said the Prime Minister would take charge of Lieberman’s portfolio at least temporarily. Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of the Hamas resistance movement, said Lieberman’s resignation in the aftermath of an Egypt-
brokered truce with Gaza constitutes “an admission of defeat” and a “political victory” for the Palestinian resistance in the besieged territory.

- On November 12, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu defended the Israeli decision to allow Qatar to transfer millions of dollars to Gaza despite criticism from within his own government.

The Israeli-authorised money transfer appeared to be part of talks that would see Hamas end months of often violent protests along the border in exchange for Israel easing its blockade of the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu’s remarks were his first on the issue since Israel allowed the money transfer to the enclave controlled by Hamas, which Israel, the US and EU consider a terrorist movement. While defending the transfer of money, Netanyahu said, “I’m doing what I can, in coordination with the security establishment, to return quiet to the southern communities, but also to prevent a humanitarian crisis.” He also said the Israeli security establishment supported the move and that ministers in his security cabinet approved it. According to authorities in Gaza, a total of $90 million is to be distributed in six monthly instalments, primarily to cover salaries of officials working for Hamas. Qatar has also said it would hand out $100 to each of 50,000 poor families, as well as larger sums to Palestinians wounded in clashes along the Gaza-Israel border.

- On November 4, Israel’s Transport and Intelligence Minister, Yisrael Katz visited Oman to propose plans for a railway linking the Gulf to the Mediterranean via Israel.

During the annual meeting of the International Road Transport Union, Katz proposed the “Tracks for Regional Peace” initiative which calls for a rail link connecting Saudi Arabia with the Mediterranean Sea. According to observers, the proposal is part of a push by Israel to capitalise on regional developments, particularly anti-Iran sentiments, and to overcome decades of Arab hostility.

Lebanon

- On November 10, Secretary General of Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said that his fellow fighters would not hesitate to respond proportionately to any Israeli act of aggression against the country.

Nasrallah said, “We will retaliate against any attack on Lebanon. We will not accept any enemy aggression against our country.” He also praised sacrifices made by resistance fighters, stressing that their heroic actions had helped Hezbollah score glorious victories. He also criticised attempts by certain regional states to normalise diplomatic relations with the Israeli regime. The Hezbollah Secretary General also praised Iran’s stance vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue, stating that sanctions against Iran would have no effect on the movement.
Libya

- On November 14, an international summit on Libya ended in the Italian city of Palermo with commitments but no binding agreement between warring factions.

French Foreign Minister Jean Yves Le Drian, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and various other leaders also attended the summit. In a joint press conference, UN Special Envoy for Libya Ghassan Salame and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte described the two-day summit as a “success” and a “first step in the right direction”. However, the summit ended without a written agreement and with no clear timetable either for the national conference or the electoral process. It was also unclear whether the parties found a common ground with regards to the additional economic and security measures needed to stabilise the country. The UN envoy said renegade General Khalifa Haftar, the most reluctant to engage in the UN-led process, was “committed to support” the proposed plan. There are two rival parliaments in Libya: the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli headed by Fayez al-Serraj, and the eastern-based House of Representatives (HOR) which is a self-styled Libyan National Army and run by General Haftar. The UN and most of the international community support Fayez al-Serraj. PM Conte said he regretted that some of the delegates decided to walk out of the conference, referring to Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay’s withdrawal from the plenary meeting. The Turkish delegation was apparently disappointed at not being invited to join the informal meeting between Haftar and Fayyaz al-Serraj.

Palestine

- On November 12, Israeli Forces burned down the headquarters of Al-Aqsa TV station run by the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas.

The raid was part of the fresh airstrikes and rocket attacks by Israeli warplanes and artillery which are targeting areas throughout the Gaza Strip and have so far killed several people, including a Hamas commander. In retaliation, the Palestinian resistance fired over 400 rockets, mortar bombs, and at least one anti-tank missile from Gaza into the occupied territories, including military positions. A spokesman for the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, said the Joint Operations room for Palestinian Resistance has vowed to expand the range of military strikes deeper into the occupied territories.

- According to Press Tv on November 11, Israeli Special Forces infiltrated the Gaza Strip and assassinated a top Hamas commander Nour Baraka while subsequent Israeli airstrikes killed five others.

According to a statement, the Forces had made their way into the coastal sliver using a civilian vehicle and assassinated Nour, a senior commander with Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’
military wing, in a drive-by shooting near the city of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza. A firefight erupted afterwards, with Israeli aircraft firing from above “to cover the retreat of Israeli Forces. According to local witnesses, the aircraft fired over 20 missiles during the strikes. Five more people were killed during the air strikes, including Mohammad al-Qarra, another Hamas commander. This is not the first time Hamas officials have come under Israeli attack. The regime has assassinated numerous Hamas officials in the past.

Qatar

- On November 14, Qatari Defence Minister, Khalid al-Attiyah met with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Washington over US plan to create a NATO-like Arab military alliance.

According to a US State Department press release, Pompeo and al-Attiyah “discussed working toward a Middle East Strategic Alliance, anchored by a united GCC to advance prosperity, security, and stability in the region.” Prior to US President Donald Trump’s 2017 visit to Saudi Arabia, reports said he was expected to lay out his vision for what White House officials called an “Arab NATO,” comprised of six Persian Gulf Arab countries, Egypt and Jordan. According to observers, the goal of creating such an alliance is to counter the growing influence of Iran in the Middle East. However, a diplomatic standoff between Qatar and a Saudi-led quartet of countries seems to have already hampered the formation of the so-called “Arab NATO.”

Saudi Arabia

- On November 12, British Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt held talks with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz in Riyadh.

Hunt and King Salman discussed the latest developments in the region. Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir and Britain’s Ambassadors to Saudi Arabia and Yemen also attended the meeting. Hunt called on Saudi Arabia to end its war against Yemen while pressing for the Kingdom’s cooperation with an investigation into the brutal killing of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

- According to a November 11 report by The New York Times, Saudi Major General, Ahmed al-Assiri, who has allegedly been fired over the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, took part in a 2017 meeting in Riyadh that involved plans to assassinate Iran’s Major General Qassem Soleimani, as well as sabotaging Iran’s economy.

According to the report, the March 2017 meeting in Riyadh brought together businessmen who “pitched a $2 billion plan to use private intelligence operatives to sabotage the Iranian economy.” It also stated, “Top Saudi intelligence officials close to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman asked a small group of businessmen last year about using private companies to
assassinate Iranian enemies of the Kingdom.” The report stated that planning for assassinations, like that of dissident journalist Khashoggi, started “since the beginning of Prince Mohammed’s ascent.” General Soleimani has been at the forefront of Iran’s advisory efforts in Syria and Iraq. Iran’s Foreign Ministry has accused Washington of seeking to wage an extensive “psychological war” against Tehran, insisting that such US measures are not worthy of much concern. The new revelation adds to the embarrassment the Kingdom is facing in the wake of Khashoggi’s assassination at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul as well as violation of human rights in the war on Yemen.

Syria

- On November 15, Russia confirmed that US warplanes are using white phosphorous bombs in their airstrikes against civilian-populated areas east of the Euphrates River, leaving civilian casualties.

- On November 13, at least 28 people were killed during air strikes by the US-led coalition on Al-Shafaa village in an eastern Syria holdout of Daesh.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova said, “The Americans have resumed intensive airstrikes against terrorist-controlled settlements along the eastern bank of Euphrates.” She also said that according to local residents, US-led coalition jet fighters are using “white phosphorus munitions” in their airstrikes. White phosphorus munitions are banned under the 1977 First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The Russian comments came after Syria’s official news agency SANA reported that the US-led coalition has carried out fresh aerial attacks against residential areas in Deir ez-Zor province, using internationally-banned cluster bombs. Cluster bombs are banned under the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) which is an international treaty that addresses the humanitarian consequences and unacceptable harm caused to civilians by cluster munitions through a categorical prohibition and a framework for action. On November 13, 2018, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates condemned the recent air strikes by the US on the eastern town of al-Shafaa.

- On November 12, Hossein Jaberi Ansari, Senior Assistant to the Iranian Foreign Minister on special political affairs, met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus and discussed anti-terror cooperation.

Assad’s political and media adviser, Bouthaina Shaaban, Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mikdad and the Iranian ambassador to Damascus also attended the meeting. Stressing the importance of Syrian-Iranian relations as a factor of stability, the two sides reaffirmed both nations’ determination to continue combating terrorism across the region. They also underlined the need for a political settlement as the sole solution to the Syrian crisis. They also vowed to
resist any pressure by the US, which is attempting to revive terrorists to topple the government in Damascus. The Syrian and Iranian sides also discussed a yet-to-be-formed constitutional committee, which is supposed to include representatives from various Syrian groups. The committee is expected to include 150 members: 50 chosen by Damascus, 50 by the opposition and the final 50 by the UN outgoing envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura. It will also include civil society representatives, religious and tribal leaders, experts and women.

- According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on November 2, at least 8 people were killed during Syrian government shelling on a rebel-held area in the country’s northwest.

The artillery shelling marked another violation of a truce reached between Russia and Turkey in September 2018. The agreement to set up a demilitarised zone 15-20 kilometres deep and stretching along the front lines around Idlib, including parts of the provinces of Latakia, Hama and Aleppo, aimed to avert a government offensive on the area. It also called on militants to evacuate the demilitarised zone however many of them did not pull out. Idlib has recently witnessed internal fighting between Al Qaeda-linked militants and Turkey-backed Syrian opposition fighters.

- According to Turkish Defence Minister, Hulusi Akar on November 1, troops from Turkey and the US launched joint patrols in the northern Syrian city of Manbij in an attempt to ease tensions between the NATO allies.

Akar said, “The joint patrol in Manbij between Turkish Armed Forces and the US began today at 3.53pm.” The city is controlled by the US-backed Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) militia, which Turkey considers a terrorist group. The patrol took place around the Sajur River that divides Manbij and the region of Jarabulus, which was captured by Turkish-backed Syrian rebels from Daesh in 2016 during Ankara’s first offensive in northern Syria. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an umbrella group dominated by the YPG, captured Manbij from Daesh. There are US forces in the Sunni Arab-majority Manbij which lies just 30 kilometres south of the Turkish border and Washington has been closely working with the YPG in its fight against Daesh. The US support of the Kurdish militia has strained its relations with Turkey.

Turkey

- On November 12, the Turkish government rejected as “very impudent” France’s accusation that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was playing a “political game” over the killing of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Turkey’s reaction came after French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian questioned Erdogan’s remarks that Ankara had given tapes pertaining to Khashoggi’s murder to Saudi Arabia as well as four Western countries, the US, Germany, Britain and France. Le Drian said
France was not to his knowledge, in possession of the recordings and accused Erdogan of lying and not cooperating in the investigation process. Ankara rejected these remarks and insisted that it had shared evidence related to Khashoggi’s case with Paris. Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu said, “Our intelligence shared information with them on October 24, including the voice recordings. It is very impudent for them to accuse our President of playing political games.” He also said, “I wouldn’t be surprised if soon France chooses to deny this murder, even though Saudi Arabia already confessed. What’s behind the remarks of the French Foreign Minister? I wonder if they are trying to cover up the murder.”

- On November 6, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan criticised the new sanctions on Iran imposed by the Trump Administration, saying they were aimed at upsetting the global balance and against international law.

On November 5, 2018, Washington announced sanctions on Iran that aim to isolate the country’s banking sector and cut its oil exports. While criticising the new sanctions, Erdogan said, “We don’t find the sanctions appropriate because to us, they are aimed at upsetting the global balance. They are against international law and diplomacy. We don’t want to live in an imperial world.” During 2018, Washington imposed two sets of sanctions after pulling out of the nuclear agreement with Iran. Washington has granted eight countries, including Turkey and Japan, waivers to allow them to continue importing Iranian oil without facing diplomatic consequences.

- On November 4, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned foreign oil companies over energy exploration off Cyprus, calling those who defy Ankara as “bandits of the sea. Erdogan said they would face a similar response as Turkey’s foes in Syria. During his speech marking the commissioning of a new Turkish warship, Erdogan warned that exploiting the resources of the eastern Mediterranean while excluding Ankara was unacceptable. Drilling for hydrocarbon resources off EU member Cyprus is hugely sensitive as its northern third is occupied by Turkish Forces who invaded in 1974 in response to a coup aimed at uniting the island with Greece. The Turkish-populated northern part of the island then declared the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which is recognised only by Ankara. UN-backed efforts to reunify the island have so far come to nothing. Foreign energy companies such as ExxonMobil of the US, Italy’s ENI and France’s Total have all said they are committed to energy drilling off Cyprus, in defiance of past warnings from Erdogan. Erdogan said, “Those who thought they could take steps in the Eastern Mediterranean or the Aegean in defiance of Turkey have now begun to understand what a big mistake they were making. It is absolutely unacceptable to usurp the natural resources of the eastern Mediterranean while excluding Turkey and the TRNC.” He also said, “As we made the terrorists in Syria pay, we will not leave the scene to the bandits of the sea.” Analysts have warned that the situation is extremely sensitive with the risk that one false move could lead to a major confrontation.
Yemen

- On November 14, forces loyal to Yemen’s government halted an offensive on the port of Hodeida as the UAE supports ‘early’ UN peace talks.

According to military sources, pro-government forces were ordered to stop their assault against the Houthi rebels until further notice, but would resume operations should the insurgents attack. According to Anwar Gargash, the UAE State Minister for Foreign Affairs, the UAE welcomed the “early convening of UN-led talks in Sweden” and urged warring factions to take advantage of diplomatic efforts. The UN is pushing for peace talks by the end of 2018, and Sweden said it is ready to host them. The developments came after the offensive on Hodeida by pro-government forces and the Saudi-led coalition, including the UAE, appeared to stall. Gargash said, “After 12 days of clashes, Hodeida was quiet and its port was operating. We are working closely with the UN on expanding humanitarian assistance for all areas of Yemen.”

- On November 9, at least 110 Houthi rebels and 22 pro-government troops were killed during intense fighting in Hodeida.

The latest deaths raised to 382 the number of fighters killed on both sides since the battle for Hodeida intensified on November 1, 2018. Norway said it was freezing all defence material export licences to Saudi Arabia over the war in Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition has been waging an aerial bombing campaign in Yemen aimed at pushing the Houthis back, but the rebels still hold the key port city of Hodeida and the capital Sanaa.

- On November 7, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Chief of Yemen’s Houthi movement, vowed he would never surrender to Saudi-backed pro-government forces.

During a televised speech from an undisclosed location, Abdul Malik admitted that he was outnumbered and the alliance had made headway into Hodeida. Following six days of intense fighting, pro-government forces moved even closer to the heart of Hodeida, controlled by the Houthi rebels and under blockade by Saudi Arabia and its allies. According to government sources, the coalition, an alliance led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, had sent fighter jets and Apache attack helicopters to cover Yemeni troops fighting rebels on the ground. Abdul Malik said, “The enemy benefits from its numbers, which it has increased even further to pressure the city of Hodeida. Does the enemy think that penetrating this or that area, or seizing this or that area, means we will be convinced that we should surrender and hand over control? This is not happening and will not happen ever.” International aid groups have appealed to both the rebels and the alliance to allow civilians to escape the densely populated city where there are around 600,000 people. Thirty-five Yemeni and international NGOs have called for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Yemen, where they warned the Saudi-led coalition’s war has put 14 million people on the brink of famine.

---Muhammad Shoab
SOUTH ASIA: I

Pakistan
External

- On November 15, Pakistan’s Foreign Office spokesperson, Dr Mohammad Faisal conveyed the country’s “strong concerns” to the Afghan government over the “inordinate delay” in handing over the dead body of Pakistani police official, Tahir Khan Dawar.

Tahir Khan Dawar was kidnapped from Islamabad on October 26, 2018. The Afghan Foreign Ministry informed the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul on November 14, 2018 that Dawar’s body was found by locals in Dur Baba district of Afghanistan’s Nangarhar Province. Afghan Ambassador Omar Zakhilwal said that Kabul and Islamabad should both conduct investigations into Dawar’s mysterious killing.

- On November 8, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi informed the Senate that Pakistan would not send its troops to Yemen to lend support to the Saudi-led forces. He said that Pakistan has friendly relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran and it seeks to play a mediatory role between the two countries. He emphasised that both countries give importance to Pakistan due to its neutral stance. The Foreign Minister warned that the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran had reached alarming levels and that the proxy wars between the two could potentially destabilise the entire region.

- On November 6, Alice Wells, the US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, visited Islamabad and held delegation-level discussions with Pakistani officials at the Foreign Office.

Both sides reviewed progress in bilateral relations and discussed the evolving regional situation with a focus on Afghan reconciliation efforts. The two sides also agreed to continue efforts to promote the shared objectives of regional peace and stability. Alice Wells also met with Finance Minister, Asad Umar and discussed issues related to bilateral economic cooperation and international cooperation to curb terror financing. The Finance Minister told the US Envoy that Pakistan would continue to take all possible steps to counter terror financing and money laundering. Meanwhile, Alice Wells apprised the Finance Minister of the US’ efforts for regional security. In a related development on November 7, 2018, Pakistan’s Foreign Office said that Pakistani officials also raised the issue of “respecting the human and legal rights” of Dr Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist, with Alice Wells. Dr Aafia, who was convicted in 2010 on charges of attempted murder and assault of US personnel, is serving an 86-year sentence at the Federal Medical Centre, Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas.

- On November 6, Prime Minister Imran Khan chaired a meeting of the National Security Committee (NSC) to review the country’s security situation.
The meeting concluded that progress and prosperity of Pakistan lies in peace, stability and rule of law. The Prime Minister also apprised the participants about his visit to China on November 2, 2018.

- On November 2, Prime Minister Imran Khan visited China and held meetings with the Chinese leadership including, President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress Li Zhanshu.

Prime Minister Imran Khan was accompanied by a high-level delegation including Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Finance Minister, Asad Umar. Both sides held an in-depth exchange of views on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. During his meeting with President Xi, the Prime Minister said that Pakistan wants “to learn from China’s experience in poverty alleviation and curbing corruption.” On his part, President Xi Jinping told the Pakistani Premier that Pak-China relations had not only “benefited the two countries but also the region.” Both leaders reaffirmed the “all-weather” friendship between the two countries. Prime Minister Imran Khan also commended President Xi Jinping’s “visionary” Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The two sides reiterated that the BRI represents a win-win model of international cooperation and stressed that the fast development of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) had played a significant role in the Belt and Road cooperation. Both sides agreed to task the CPEC Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) to explore new areas of cooperation. The two countries also agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, finance, science and technology, agriculture, education and other sectors and signed 15 important cooperation agreements in related fields. Pakistan is facing a balance of payment crisis and is seeking economic assistance from close allies in order to be able to avoid a complete International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) bailout. Meanwhile, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou said that China was willing to provide Pakistan with economic aid but more discussions are needed on the details.

- In a related development on November 4, 2018, Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Shanghai to attend the first China International Import Expo (CIIE). In Shanghai, Imran Khan met his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev and exchanged views on international and regional issues. The two leaders expressed satisfaction on the upward trajectory of the bilateral relations.

- On November 2, Maulana Samiul Haq, the Chief of his own faction of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) was assassinated following a knife attack by an unknown assailant at his residence in Rawalpindi.

No organisation claimed responsibility for the assassination. The country’s political leadership and religious scholars condemned the assassination and urged the government to bring the culprits to justice. Haq was the founder of Islamic religious seminary, Darul Uloom Haqqania in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He was considered an influential figure among members of the Afghan
Taliban. In recent months, some Afghan clerics had requested Haq to use his influence in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table.

- On November 7, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to follow the “decided timeline and procedures for repatriation” of Afghan refugees.

The agreement was reached during the meeting of the Refugee Working Group (WG) under the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Stability (APAPPS). The government has not publicly announced the timeline for repatriation. However, media reports claim that the Pakistani government wants the Afghan refugees with Afghan citizen cards to be repatriated by December 2018, whereas the registered refugees are expected to return by June 2019. In February 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani pledged to ensure the return of all Afghan refugees living in Pakistan to Afghanistan within “the next 24 months”.

Pakistan Internal

- According to *The Nation* on November 2, Azad Jammu and Kashmir’s (AJK) President Sardar Masood Khan lauded an independent report on the human rights situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) launched by the All Parties Parliamentary Group on Kashmir (APPKG) at the House of Commons.

The President appealed to the British Parliamentarians to help find a political and diplomatic solution to the Kashmir dispute through the realisation of the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people.

- On November 3, Pakistan’s Foreign Office’s Director General (South Asia & SAARC), Dr. Mohammad Faisal summoned the Indian Deputy High Commissioner, J.P. Singh and condemned the unprovoked ceasefire violations by Indian forces along the Line of Control (LoC) on 2 November 2018 in Bhimbar Sector.

The ceasefire violation resulted in the killing of a women in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). According to the Foreign Office the Indian forces have carried out more than 2312 ceasefire violations along the LoC and the Working Boundary in 2018, which resulted in the killing of 35 civilians and injuring 135 others.

- On November 2, the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), an extremist religious-political group, agreed to end protests across the country after reaching an agreement with the government.

According to the agreement, the government would not object to the review petition filed against the Supreme Court’s verdict in which Asiya Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death on charges of blasphemy was acquitted. The Supreme Court ruled that the evidence against Asia
Bibi was fabricated and insufficient. Members of some extremist religious groups started nationwide demonstrations in reaction to the Supreme Court’s verdict. Following the decision, Khadim Hussain Rizvi, leader of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) incited people against the government and the army. He also threatened to kill the Supreme Court’s judges who gave the verdict. In response Prime Minister Imran Khan warned extremist groups not to clash with the state.

- In a related development on November 12, 2018 Canadian Foreign Minister, Chrystia Freeland telephoned his Pakistani counterpart, Shah Mehmood Qureshi and discussed the issue of Asiya Bibi. According to media reports, Canadian government might offer asylum to Asiya Bibi.

India

- On November 14, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with US Vice President, Mike Pence on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Singapore.

The two leaders reiterated the importance of the US-India strategic partnership. Both leaders discussed bilateral and global issues of mutual interests including defence and trade cooperation, ways to counter terrorism and the need for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific. Pence told the Indian Premier that he encouraged “free, fair, and reciprocal trade with India.” Meanwhile, Narendra Modi said that the mainstreaming of Mumbai’s attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed in Pakistan should be a matter of serious concern not just to India and the US but to the international community.

- Reuters reported on November 9 that the Indian government would sell stocks worth at least $412 million seized from people who moved to Pakistan following partition in 1947, as a way to make up for a shortfall in revenues.

The stocks are part of what India terms “enemy properties” that once belonged to people who migrated to Pakistan and China. Once these people became citizens of these two countries, they were treated as “enemies” in India and their assets in the country including land, houses and shares were seized and held by the Custodian of Enemy Property of India.

- On November 9, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson, Raveesh Kumar welcomed the US’ decision for granting a waiver to India to import Iranian crude oil despite imposition of US sanctions on Iran.

Kumar appreciated the US for “taking into account India’s need for energy security”. On November 5, 2018 the Trump Administration announced the imposition of sanctions against Iran’s banking and energy sectors with the aim of cutting off its oil sales and crucial exports.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer
Afghanistan

- On November 12, a suicide bomb blast left at least 6 people dead and another 20 wounded in Kabul’s Pastunistan square.

The explosion occurred at a gathering where hundreds of protesters had gathered for a protest over the lack of security and the growing Taliban threat in Ghazni and Uruzgan provinces. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.


It was Khalilzad’s second visit to Afghanistan since he was appointed in September, 2018. Between November 11 and 20, 2018, Khalilzad will also visit Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. After wrapping up his trip Khalilzad will return to Kabul to brief the Afghan government. He visited the region in October 2018, stopping first in Kabul before visiting four other countries and meeting with the Taliban in Qatar. His meeting with the Taliban was marred with controversy, as the Afghan authorities had not been informed about the meeting.

- On November 9, a Taliban delegation along with representatives from 11 countries including the US, participated in the Moscow Summit to find ways for a political breakthrough in Afghanistan.

A delegation from Afghanistan’s High Peace Council (HPC) also attended the meeting. While inaugurating the summit, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov highlighted the significance of direct talks between Kabul and the Taliban to help resolve the conflict. He also called on all stake holders to focus attention to confront the rising threat of Daesh. The Taliban delegation at the meeting maintained that the withdrawal of foreign troops was the prerequisite for commencement of intra-Afghan negotiations for peace in the country. Meanwhile, a member of HPC justified the presence of foreign troops as a prerequisite for peace. The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the HPC had participated in the Moscow Summit in its own capacity and did not represent the Afghan government. They also said however that the Afghan government supports efforts by any country that would lead to peace. Delegates from China, Pakistan, Iran and India were also present at the summit. Although the meeting could not yield a significant breakthrough, the presence of almost all stake holders to the Afghan conflict highlights Russia’s resurgence and growing influence in the region.

- On November 6, at least 20 Afghan soldiers were killed in a Taliban offensive on a military base in the western Farah province.

The Taliban claimed that they have captured the base and killed at least 30 soldiers. In a related development on November 5, 2018, the insurgent group seized another important check post in Ghazni province and killed at least 13 members of government forces. In a retaliatory attack on
November 7, 2018, the government forces killed at least 16 Taliban members in Baghlan province. The casualty rate among Afghan Security personnel has been very high since US President, Donald Trump announced his Afghanistan centric South Asia strategy in August 2017. In September 2018 alone, at least 500 members of Afghan Security Forces were killed.

- On November 6, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg paid a surprise visit to Afghanistan and reaffirmed the Alliance’s support to Afghan Security Forces.

Stoltenberg held separate meetings with Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah. He reiterated that NATO was committed to train, assist and advise Afghan Security Forces. He also called on the Taliban to stop killing the people. He further stressed the need for an Afghan owned and Afghan led peace process and called on Russia to coordinate its efforts with the Afghan government to that end. Meanwhile, Ghani hailed NATO’s military and financial cooperation with Afghanistan and said that Afghanistan and NATO have become two strong partners.

- On November 4, Alice Wells, the US’ Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs arrived in Afghanistan and held talks with Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani.

The talks were focused on the US’ sanctions on Iran and its impacts on Afghanistan with special focus on Chabahar port. On November 6, 2018, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo granted an exception to India-led development of the Chabahar port from sanctions. The US also decided to permit the construction of a railway line from Chabahar port to Afghanistan and shipments of goods like food and medicines. Afghanistan would also be allowed to import petroleum products from Iran.

- On November 1, the Commander of the US Forces in Afghanistan, General Scott Miller said that the solution of the Afghan conflict would be political, not military.

Miller also suggested a more aggressive policy of helping Afghan Armed Forces to pressurise the Taliban to reconcile. His remarks come at a time when the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in its quarterly report said that the Afghan government’s control of districts is at the lowest level since the institution started tracking. The Afghan government has lost its influence over 15% of its districts since 2015. The report also said that the government forces made no progress in pressurising the Taliban for a political break through. The report also pointed to a high number of casualties among Afghan Forces. On October 30, 2018, US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis said that Afghan Forces suffered 1000 casualties in August and September 2018.

**Bangladesh**

- On November 8, Bangladesh announced the date for national elections.
The announcement comes amid a bitter row between the government and the opposition. The 11th parliamentary election is now set for December 23, 2018. Bangladeshi Prime Minister and the leader of the Awami League, Sheikh Hasina has been criticised for crushing the political dissent over the last year. She has not only put ex-Prime Minister and leader of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), Khalida Zia in jail over corruption charges but also awarded death sentences and life imprisonments to many close aides of Zia. The BNP is the main opposition party, which had boycotted the previous general elections. Although their demand of Zia’s release from prison has not been met yet and its chances are also bleak, the BNP has decided to contest the coming elections.

Sri Lanka

- On November 14, the SriLankan Parliament passed a motion of no-confidence against Mahinda Rajapakse, the country’s controversially appointed Prime Minister.

Parliamentary Speaker, Karu Jayasuriya ruled that a majority of the 225-member assembly supported a no-confidence motion against Rajapakse. On October 26, 2018, Sri Lankan President, Maithripala Sirisena sacked Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe and replaced him with Rajapaksa. On November 9, 2018, Sirisena dissolved the legislature and called snap elections. However, the Supreme Court overturned the Presidential Decree. Although, Wickremesinghe’s United National Party holds majority in the parliament, Sirisena retains the power to choose the next Prime Minister.

---Kashif Hussain
On November 13, Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, noted that Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh were suffering from ‘terror and panic’ for being at risk to be returned to Myanmar against their will.

Bachelet indicated that there were plans for repatriation of 2,200 Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. Women or children head several families that are listed for return. However, the refugees are not willing to be returned with “complete lack of accountability” and ongoing violations in Myanmar. She stressed, “Forcibly expelling or returning refugees is a clear violation of the core legal principle of non-refoulement.” She added, “Any returns must take place in line with international standards of voluntariness, safety and dignity, with full transparency, and only when the conditions are right.” She also urged the Government of Myanmar to create favourable conditions for return of refugees by addressing the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine state. Hundreds of thousands of Myanmar’s mainly-Muslim minority Rohingya were forced to flee their homes in Rakhine state and seek refuge across the country’s border owing to the widespread and systematic violence against them. According to the UN, there are an estimated 925,000 Rohingya refugees sheltering in Bangladesh, most of them in the district of Cox’s Bazar. On November 12, 2018, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi also expressed his concerns over the repatriation of refugees without their consent. Grandi also said that the responsibility rests with Myanmar, to ensure that conditions are conducive for voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable returns from Bangladesh.

On November 11, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the resolution of all global problems, from conflict, economic downturn to climate change and diseases, requires a strengthening of international cooperation.

While commemorating 100 years since the end of the First World War at the Paris Peace Forum, Guterres said, “Over the past 100 years, the desire to settle conflicts peacefully on the basis of common rules has been converted into a universal system of institutions in the political, economic, social and environmental spheres.” He said that the hope for a peaceful world had led to the development of multilateralism in the twentieth century. During his talk, Guterres drew many parallels between the world in the first half of the 20th century and today including the 2008 financial crisis, similar to the crisis of 1929, political and social polarisation of states to the rise of totalitarianism in the 1930s and weakening of democracy and indifference to multilateralism. He said this situation was “giving us grounds to fear that an unpredictable chain of events could ensue.” The Secretary-General indicated that the present world seemed ‘chaotic,’ and was moving towards multidimensional multipolarity, which would not help in resolving global issues. On the necessity of multilateralism, Guterres said, “Without the multilateral system and respect for international rules, we risk a return solely to power relations, reward-sanction mechanisms and a cycle of frozen conflicts.” The Paris Peace Forum is an
initiative of the French Government led by President Emmanuel Macron, labelled as “a global forum for governance projects.” The event held from November 11 to November 13, 2018, in Paris during which world leaders and representatives of international organisations discussed challenges facing the world today.

- On November 9, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that the US must abide by international refugee protection accords. The UNHCR’s statement came in response to US President Donald Trump’s proclamation which would deny political asylum to migrants crossing illegally into the country. The Presidential Proclamation would reportedly ban migrants applying for asylum outside official ports of entry. The UNHCR said that the Agency “expects all countries, including the US, to make sure any person in need of refugee protection and humanitarian assistance is able to receive both promptly and without obstruction, in accordance with the 1967 refugee Protocol to which the US is a party.” The statement also said that it was unrealistic for asylum seekers to present themselves at the border and request protection. The Refugee Agency noted that Official US southern border ports of entry have had a long-standing lack of sufficient capacity to receive migrants. In a related development on November 6, 2018, Charlie Yaxley, spokesperson for the UNHCR, indicated that more than 2,000 migrants have lost their lives since January 2018 trying to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe. Yaxley said, “The Mediterranean has for several years been the world’s deadliest sea route for refugees and migrants. That it continues to be so should be unacceptable to all.” He also mentioned that some 105,000 migrants and refugees seeking asylum have reached Europe so far in 2018, representing a drop to pre-2014 levels. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), year 2018 was the fifth consecutive year in which refugee arrivals to Europe have remained more than 100,000.

- According to a November 6 Report of United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), the Afghan Taliban’s armed campaign during Afghanistan’s October elections was the deadliest for civilians in the last couple of years. According to the report titled the 2018 Elections Violence, on October 20, 2018 and days following the election when delayed polling took place there were approximately 435 civilian casualties in which 56 people lost their lives and 379 were injured. The report stated that the figure represented the highest number of civilians killed and injured since the UN began its systematic documentation of civilian casualties in 2009. Ahead of the polling, the Taliban had warned that all election sites in the country would be under attack, cautioning citizens not to get involved in the election process. According to the report, only 4.2 million cast a ballot out of 8.8 million Afghans registered to vote, showing that large numbers were unwilling or unable to cast a vote. The report said, “The Taliban’s actions forced many ordinary Afghans to choose between exercising their right to participate in the political process and risking their own safety.”
On November 6, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) warned that intense fighting near a major hospital in Yemen’s port city of Hudaydah has put lives of number of children to ‘imminent risk of death.’

On November 2, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on the warring parties in Yemen and the international community to “halt the senseless cycle of violence” and “reach a political settlement to the Yemen conflict.”

Henrietta H. Fore, the Executive Director of UNICEF, said the intense fighting near the Al Thawra hospital was alarming. Fore said, “We call on all parties to cease hostilities near and around the hospital, and to ensure that civilians can safely access the hospital from all sides.” According to the UN, there are at least 59 children currently in the hospital, including some 25 under treatment at its intensive care unit. The hospital’s medical staff considers access to and from the hospital endangered. Fore warned that further escalation in fighting would jeopardise the UNICEF’s efforts to deliver lifesaving assistance to many in dire need, including acutely malnourished children. She also indicated that fighting has intensified around Hudaydah port which is a main gateway to 80% of humanitarian aid, fuel and commercial goods that flow into Yemen. She said, “The toll in lives could be catastrophic if the port is damaged, destroyed or blocked.” Regarding the Yemeni children’s overall situation, Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, said on November 4, 2018, that some 30,000 children in Yemen die each year of malnutrition. Cappelaere said, “A living hell not for 50-60% of children. It is a living hell for every single boy and girl in Yemen,” He said that one child was dying in every 10 minutes in Yemen from diseases that can be easily prevented. He also called for an urgent ceasefire and a lasting settlement to the Yemen conflict.

In a related development on November 2, 2018, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the current horrific situation in Yemen was a man-made disaster, not a natural one. While calling the situation ‘desperate’ on the humanitarian side, Guterres, however, noted that there were signs of hope on the political side. He said, “The international community has a real opportunity to halt the senseless cycle of violence and to prevent an imminent catastrophe.” For a constructive settlement to the conflict, the Secretary-General outlined several steps to be urgently taken including: an immediate cessation of hostilities, ensuring humanitarian access to civilians and stabilising the exchange rate of the Yemeni Rial. He also urged the warring parties to “overcome obstacles and resolve differences through dialogue at UN-facilitated consultations.”

An UN-backed report released on November 5, claimed that the ozone layer was being healed, and hailed the development as an achievement of global agreements on the climate change.

The study, “Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion: 2018”, is the latest in a series of reports, released every four years, which monitor the recovery of ozone in the stratosphere. The report
indicated that the concentration of the harmful substances for the ozone layer continued to decrease, implying that the situation would lead to an improvement in the layer. According to the report, “Ozone in parts of the stratosphere has recovered at a rate of 1-3% since 2000 and, at projected rates, Northern Hemisphere and mid-latitude ozone is scheduled to heal completely by the 2030s, followed by the Southern Hemisphere in the 2050s and Polar Regions by 2060.” The report stressed that the achievement was the result of internationally agreed actions carried out under the historic Montreal Protocol. Signed by 197 countries, the 1987 Montreal Protocol is the first treaty in the history of the UN to achieve universal ratification. The international treaty aims to protect the stratospheric ozone layer by phasing out the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances (ODS).

- On November 1, the UN condemned the US for its continued economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba.

A total of 189 UN Member States voted in favour, with Israel and the US voting against the resolution, calling on all the states to repeal or invalidate laws or measures that interfere with the freedom of trade and navigation in Cuba. Though the vote on the resolution cannot be enforced, the Cuban-sponsored resolution identifies a spotlight on the relative isolation of the US regarding the embargo, which was first imposed in 1960, when former leader Fidel Castro came to power. Regarding the impact of continued embargo on the lives of Cubans, Cuba’s Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla said, “Incalculable human damage has been caused by the blockade, which is qualified as an act of genocide.”

--- Moiz Khan