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General Observations

Pakistan

- On August 14, Prime Minister Imran Khan promised to “teach India a lesson” in case it commits an act of aggression against Pakistan. The Prime Minister also warned India that Pakistan was ready to fight back. Khan’s statement came in the wake of India’s August 5, 2019 unilateral decision to remove the special status held for decades by Jammu and Kashmir.

- The move has provoked outrage in Pakistan amid worries of a fresh armed conflict in IOK. India has moved an additional 38,000 troops into the region. It has however dismissed Pakistan’s reaction over its move and warned against interfering in what it insists is an internal matter. Home Minister Amit Shah announced his government’s decision to remove the autonomous status that had served as the foundation for Kashmir joining India more than 70 years ago. The move provoked serious violence in the occupied territories. The BJP led Hindu nationalist government sent in thousands of army troops to suppress any unrest the move would create in the restive region. Government authorities severed internet connections, mobile phone lines and even land lines. The information black hole has made it very difficult to determine what is happening in the region. Whilst International human rights groups condemned the action, Hindu nationalists celebrated, saying it would bring peace and investment to the war-torn region. Meanwhile several top Kashmiri politicians were taken into custody.

- The Indian government had been carefully preparing for this action, which instantly raised tensions across the LoC in Pakistan. For almost two weeks, tens of thousands of extra troops had been deployed across Kashmir, and many Kashmiris had been expecting something big. Several legal scholars said they believed the government did not have the legal authority to change Article 370. Responding to the Indian action the Government of Pakistan said it would “exercise all possible options to counter the illegal steps” taken by the Indian government in IOK and warned New Delhi of attempting to “change the demography of Kashmir through ethnic cleansing.”

- On August 8, Pakistan approached the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) against India’s move to alter the status of IOK. Pakistan’s government had also requested UNSC President to convene an emergency meeting of the Council to discuss India’s “illegal actions” that “violate UN resolutions on Kashmir”. On August 7, Pakistan announced its decision to downgrade diplomatic relations, expel the Indian High Commissioner and suspend bilateral trade with India in the wake of New Delhi’s move to alter the status for Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan has also decided to review bilateral agreements with India.
Pakistan has informed the Indian government that it would not send its High Commissioner to India. Calling for international intervention in Kashmir, Prime Minister Imran Khan said on August 6 that India’s decision to abrogate Article 370, is in line with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) “racist ideology”.

- On August 13, Russia asked Pakistan to bilaterally resolve its dispute with India over Kashmir.

- On August 10, 2019, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi visited Beijing and held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. During the discussion, Wang Yi said China fully supports Pakistan’s decision to go to UNSC over Kashmir. Wang Yi also stressed that Indian steps could jeopardise the peace and stability in the region.

- On August 5, at least two personnel of the Pakistan Army including a major were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside remote-controlled bomb in Bajaur. In a related development on August 2, 2019, at least four soldiers were killed following terrorist attacks on security forces in North Waziristan.

- According to Dawn on August 7, US officials asked Pakistan to enhance efforts against banned organisations and their leaderships. The development follows a US delegation visit to Islamabad aimed at assessing Pakistan’s steps, actions and measures identified during the meetings of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in June 2019. Pakistani officials insist that Islamabad had taken significant steps to meet the FATF requirements relating to anti-money laundering and countering terror financing.

- On August 1, Pakistan’s government offered the Indian government consular access to Kulbhushan Jadhav, the Indian spy sentenced by Pakistan on charges of espionage and terrorism. Pakistan’s Foreign Office said the decision has been taken in accordance with verdict of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In its verdict in July 2019, the ICJ ruled that Jadhav be allowed consular access immediately and asked Pakistan to ensure “effective review and reconsideration of his conviction and sentences”.

- According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on August 3, the Indian Army used cluster ammunition on 30th and 31st July 2019 targeting the civilian population in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). According to the Pakistan Military, Indian actions are a violation of the Geneva Convention and international law. The attack killed two civilians, including a 4-year-old boy. The Indian Army rejected Pakistan’s claims of using cluster ammunition along the LoC saying “such responses are only against military targets and infiltrating terrorists who are aided by Pakistan Army.” Meanwhile, the Organisation of
Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said it was deeply concerned over the deteriorating situation in IOK, including use of banned cluster munition by the Indian forces to target civilians.

**International**

- Addressing a gathering on August 15, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his decision to revoke the special status of Indian Occupied Kashmir would restore the region to its “past glory.” Modi criticised opposition parties who opposed the abrogation of Article 370, accusing them of “playing politics”. Modi said that previous governments were reluctant to take such “bold step” because they were worried about their political future. Narendra Modi also revealed that India would now have a Chief of Defence Staff who would have authority over all three of India’s Armed Forces. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had long opposed Article 370 and its annulment was part of the party’s 2019 election manifesto. According to the BJP the move would help integrate Kashmir with the rest of India. “This is exactly what national populists do all over the world,” said Christophe Jaffrelot, a research fellow at CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS in Paris. “Clearly, India is entering a zone of economic turbulence. So this is the right time to return to the nationalistic agenda.” According to senior sources in the government, the BJP’s ideological imperative of doing away with Article 370 had always been there, it became urgent after US President Donald Trump publicly said that Prime Minister Modi had requested him to mediate on the Kashmir issue. Earlier on August 1, US President Donald Trump reiterated his offer to mediate the Kashmir dispute saying that he would “certainly intervene” to resolve this 70-year-old dispute if asked to do so. Pakistan welcomed the US President’s offer while India said it would not accept any third-party mediation for its disputes with Pakistan.

- On August 12, Indian External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing. During his meeting with Jaishankar, Yi said Beijing was “highly concerned” about the current situation in Kashmir and the escalated conflict between Pakistan and India after New Delhi’s decision to revoke IOK of its special status. According to China the Indian government’s decision to establish the Ladakh Union Territory, “which involves Chinese territory, has posed a challenge to China’s sovereignty and violated the two countries’ agreement on maintaining peace and stability in the border region.”

- On August 11 and 12 more than 150 flights in and out of Hong Kong were cancelled after thousands of anti-government protesters overran the terminals. On August 4, Hong Kong’s Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, said that the anti-government demonstrations during the past two months threatened the territory’s future.
• One week after mass shootings in Texas and Ohio, Gun control was a key talking point in Iowa on August 11, where Democratic presidential candidates emphasised the urgent need to confront gun violence in America. At a forum in Des Moines, the candidates, including Senator Elizabeth Warren voiced support for a common set of gun control proposals, like requiring universal background checks and banning assault weapons. On August 3 a gunman opened fire in a crowded Walmart store in El Paso, a Majority-Hispanic border city, killing at least 20 people and injuring dozens. In Dayton, Ohio, at least nine people were killed and 16 others wounded in a shooting on August 4 in an entertainment district. The shootings come less than a week after a gunman killed three people and wounded 13 others at a garlic festival in Gilroy, California. Trump called on the country to “condemn racism, bigotry and white supremacy” but did not endorse gun control measures. Focusing on white-supremacist violence would help ascertain whether Americans are as accepting of aggressive law enforcement policies when the suspects are not Muslims.

• On August 12 Russia said a small nuclear reactor had blown up causing the deadly accident on August 8 in northern Russia. Authorities detected a rise in radiation levels following the explosion at a military training ground in the Arkhangelsk region. The Kremlin confirmed that five nuclear scientists and at least two others had died while testing one of the newest weapons in Russia’s arsenal. Observers termed the incident “an accident waiting to happen” amid warnings that the system of treaties supporting the world’s security architecture is fast unraveling. Earlier on August 2 The Trump Administration terminated the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia. US officials said that Moscow was not complying with the INF which they believe also hampers efforts to counter China. The US departure has sparked concerns that broader efforts to curb nuclear weapons are now at greater risk of collapsing.

---Amina Afzal
AMERICAS

Domestic


According to the new rule, immigrants who rely on public programmes like food stamps and subsidised housing will find it harder to become permanent residents under the new proposal, which is scheduled to go into effect in 60 days. Critics are arguing the policy favours wealthier immigrants and disadvantages lower income migrants.

- On August 8, US President Donald Trump announced the resignation of Sue Gordon, Deputy Director of National Intelligence.

- On August 2, US President Donald Trump’s pick for the post of Director of National Intelligence, John Ratcliffe, withdrew from consideration amid growing questions about his experience and qualifications.

Trump had nominated Ratcliffe on July 28, 2019 for the post of Director of National Intelligence, after Dan Coats announced his decision to step down on August 15, 2019. A Trump loyalist, Ratcliffe has been questioned by Democrats over his qualifications for the post while Republicans have offered lukewarm expressions of support. Ratcliffe announced he will not be considering the post stating, “I do not wish for a national security and intelligence debate surrounding my confirmation, however untrue, to become a purely political and partisan issue”.

In related news, Trump announced on August 8, 2019, Sue Gordon, Deputy Director of National Intelligence will also be stepping down. Trump stated, “Sue has announced she will be leaving on August 15, which coincides with the retirement of Dan Coats”. Trump announced Joseph Maguire, a retired US Navy vice-admiral and the current Director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), would replace Sue Gordon. Trump has faced mounting criticism for being at loggerheads with his intelligence chiefs, amid a massive reshuffle of top posts of the country’s spy agencies. The Senate Intelligence Committee’s Democratic Vice Chairman, Mark Warner criticised Trump arguing, “President Trump has repeatedly demonstrated that he is seemingly incapable of hearing facts that contradict his own views” adding, “The mission of the intelligence community is to speak truth to power. Yet in pushing out two dedicated public servants in as many weeks, once again the president has shown that he has no problem prioritizing his political ego even if it comes at the expense of our national security”.

- On August 7, US immigration officials raided numerous food processing plants in Mississippi and arrested 680 people.
In the largest workplace sting in a decade, 680 mostly Latino workers were arrested as US President Donald Trump seeks to curb illegal migration. The raids left scores of children separated from their parents, with critics denouncing the Administration’s migration policies.

- On August 3, more than twenty people were killed and twenty-six others were wounded in a mass shooting in El Paso, Texas.

The mass shooting in Texas prompted Democrats to point to US President Donald Trump’s anti-immigration rhetoric after it was revealed the shooter, Patrick Wood Crusius, authored a racist, anti-immigrant manifesto. The shooter allegedly drove eight hours to the location of the crime, which is home to a large Hispanic community, and opened fire killing twenty people and injuring more than twenty-six others. Beto O’Rourke, a Democratic Presidential candidate returned to his hometown of Texas and stated, “Let’s be very clear about what is causing this and who the president is. He is an open, avowed racist and encouraging more racism in this country”. In related news, a second mass shooting rocked the US, when a shooter killed nine people and wounded twenty-seven others in Dayton, Ohio, on August 4, 2019. US President Donald Trump called on the nation to condemn white supremacy on August 5, 2019, stating “In one voice, our nation must condemn bigotry, hatred and white supremacy” adding, “These sinister ideologies must be defeated.” Trump noted, “Mental illness and hatred pulls the trigger — not the gun”. Trump’s statement drew criticism from those arguing for stricter gun laws in the US including Congressional democrats who are actively seeking to pass legislation to ban semi-automatic firearms and large-capacity magazines.

International

- On August 13, US President Donald Trump stated the US is learning “much” from a deadly blast during a Russian missile test.

Trump stated on Twitter, “The United States is learning much from the failed missile explosion in Russia. We have similar, though more advanced, technology”. He added, “The Russian ‘Skyfall’ explosion has people worried about the air around the facility, and far beyond. Not good”. Trump’s statements are in reference to an accident which took place at an Arctic military facility on the coast of the White Sea on August 8, 2019 that caused elevated radiation levels. Russian nuclear agency Rosatom confirmed a missile was being tested on a platform at sea, when its fuel caught fire and caused an explosion. Trump’s statements that the US had similar technology to the Russians was sharply rebuked by experts including, Joe Cirincione, who responded to Trump, stating, “This is bizarre. We do not have a nuclear-powered cruise missile program” adding “We tried to build one, in the 1960’s, but it was too crazy, too unworkable, too cruel even for those nuclear nuts Cold War years”. 
• On August 13, US President Donald Trump announced he would defer imposing additional tariffs on China for at least four months.

• On August 5, 2019, the US Treasury Department labelled China a currency manipulator.

Trump decided to refrain from imposing an additional 10% tariff on $300 billion in Chinese goods after he announced on August 1, 2019 the tariff increase would come into effect on September 1, 2019. Trump’s decision comes at a time when the US economy is sluggish and trade talks have failed to come to fruition between the two countries. China’s Commerce Ministry responded to Trump’s threat on August 2, 2019 stating Trump’s move to impose the new tariffs was a “serious violation” of a truce that was reached with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in June. In related news, on August 5, 2019, the US Treasury Department labeled China a currency manipulator, escalating the US-China trade war. The Treasury Department stated, “As a result of this determination, Secretary Mnuchin will engage with the International Monetary Fund to eliminate the unfair competitive advantage created by China’s latest actions”. In related news, on August 15, 2019, Trump has urged Beijing to treat Hong Kong “humanely” in order to reach a trade deal with the US.

• On August 9, US President Donald Trump announced that North Korea’s Kim Jong-un wants to meet once again to “start negotiations” after joint US-South Korea military exercises end.

Trump stated that Kim apologised for the flurry of recent short-range missile tests conducted by North Korea. Trump stated that he received a letter from the North Korean leader where he complained about “the ridiculous and expensive exercises” conducted jointly by the US and South Korea, which North Korea sees as a threat. Trump announced that Kim offered him “a small apology” for the recent tests, and assured him “that this testing would stop when the exercises end”. North Korea on August 10, 2019 fired what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles into the sea, according to South Korea’s military – the fifth round of launches in less than three weeks. While Trump and Kim have met three times – in Singapore, Hanoi and at the Korean demilitarized zone – talks have failed to reach an agreement between both parties on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. While the US and South Korea have scaled down their major military exercises since Trump and Kim’s first summit in June 2018- North Korea contends that even the downsized drills violate agreements between Kim and Trump and compel it to “develop, test and deploy the powerful physical means essential for national defense”.

• On August 8, the US State Department spokesperson, Morgan Ortagus, called China a ‘thuggish regime’ for targeting an American diplomat who met protesters in Hong Kong.

Ortagus lashed out at Beijing after a Hong Kong newspaper - Ta Kung Pao- published a photograph of a US diplomat, who it identified as Julie Eadeh of the consulate’s political
section, talking to student leaders in Hong Kong. Ortagus stated, “I don’t think that leaking an American diplomat’s private information, pictures, names of their children, I don’t think that is a formal protest, that is what a thuggish regime would do” adding “That is not how a responsible nation would behave”. She noted that it was the job of US diplomats and those from other countries to meet different people, including opposition leaders. Beijing has blamed the US for fueling protests which have erupted in Hong Kong, and has asked the US to explain reports that American diplomats were in contact with leaders of protests. Tensions are high in the Asian financial hub after two months of protests and clashes were triggered by a controversial extradition law but quickly evolved into a wider movement for democratic reforms.

- On August 7, Alice Wells, Acting Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia, met with Pakistani leadership in Islamabad.

- On August 5, the US called for the maintenance of peace along the Line of Control (LoC) after India revoked the special status of occupied Kashmir.

The US State Department spokeswoman, Morgan Ortagus on August 5, 2019, called for maintaining peace along the LoC after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu-nationalist party rushed through a presidential decree to scrap Article 370 from the constitution that grants special status for the Indian occupied Kashmir. Ortagus stated, “We are concerned about reports of detentions and urge respect for individual rights and discussion with those in affected communities” adding, “We call on all parties to maintain peace and stability along the Line of Control”. In related news, Alice Wells, Acting Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia, met with Pakistani leadership on July 7, 2019 and cleared, that India had not consulted the US prior to revoking article 370. A statement released by the US Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) stated, “Contrary to press reporting, the Indian government did not consult or inform the US Government before moving to revoke Jammu and Kashmir’s special constitutional status”. The US State Department said on July 8, 2019 that it supports direct dialogue between Pakistan and India on the Kashmir issue and called for calm and restraint as Islamabad expelled New Delhi’s envoy. The US State Department stated, “We continue to support direct dialogue between India and Pakistan on Kashmir and other issues of concern”. In related news on August 12, Alice Wells welcomed the bilateral move by Islamabad and Washington to remove travel and restrictions on each other’s diplomats. She noted, “Pleased to see that both Pakistan and the US removed travel controls and other measures inhibiting the work of one another’s diplomats” adding, “We’re both committed to a renewed effort to help our diplomatic missions work more effectively to strengthen the ties between our nations”.

- On August 6, Jon Huntsman announced his resignation as the US Ambassador to Russia.

In Huntsman’s resignation, he warned of “irreconcilable” divisions between Washington and Moscow and urged to hold “Russia accountable when its behavior threatens us and our allies”.

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According to CNN, US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the need for a new US ambassador in Russia during a telephonic call in July 2019 however, the White House has denied the subject was discussed.

- On August 6, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo met with UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab.

Pompeo stated the US will be “on the doorstep, pen in hand”, ready to sign a new trade deal with the UK as soon as possible after it exits the EU. Pompeo thanked the UK for its decision to join a US-led maritime protection force in the strait of Hormuz, to defend oil tankers following the Iranian seizure of a British-flagged vessel, the Stena Impero in July 2019, noting “This is a victory for meaningful, effective multilateralism”. Pompeo also expressed US gratitude for “contributions towards alleviating Iranian-caused suffering in Yemen”. In related news, on August 14, US speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi warned that if Brexit compromises the “seamless border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland” then Congress will block any deal.

- On August 5, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order imposing an economic embargo against Venezuela.

The order freezes all Venezuelan government assets in the US and barred transactions with its authorities. According to the order, Trump took the step “in light of the continued usurpation of power by Nicolas Maduro and persons affiliated with him, as well as human rights abuses”. Analysts have pointed out Trump’s move was the first against a western hemisphere government in over 30 years; and imposes on Caracas restrictions similar to those faced by North Korea, Iran, Syria and Cuba. The Trump Administration had previously imposed sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry- the source of most of the country's export revenue- in a bid to put pressure on the government of Nicolas Maduro. The US, along with a dozen other countries have called for Maduro to step down from power and have Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido serve as interim President until fresh elections are held. The Maduro Government has firmly resisted US calls to step down and enjoys the support of China and Russia.

- On August 3, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper announced Washington was looking to deploy new intermediate-range missiles in Asia, to counter the rise of China in the region.

Esper confirmed the US was considering deploying new medium-range conventional weapons in Asia after the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Esper noted, “We would like to deploy a capability sooner rather than later,” adding, “I would prefer months ... But these things tend to take longer than you expect.” Esper did not confirm where the US intended to deploy these weapons, stating, “I would not speculate because those things depend on plans, it’s those things you always discuss with your allies”. 11
On August 2, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad held discussions with Pakistani leadership on developments in the Afghan peace process.

In his meetings with Prime Minister Imran Khan, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, and Chief of Army Staff General Javed Bajwa, Khalilzad outlined the positive momentum in the Afghan peace process. Khalilzad noted that consolidating peace in Afghanistan requires reliable assurances from Afghanistan and Pakistan that neither side’s territory is used to threaten the other’s. Such assurances, on top of an intra-Afghan comprehensive peace agreement, will allow for increased regional economic integration, connectivity, and development.

On August 2, the US withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced Washington’s formal withdrawal from the INF Treaty, minutes after Russia announced the treaty to be ‘dead’. Both sides blamed each other for the collapse of the Treaty. Pompeo stated, “Russia is solely responsible for the treaty’s demise”. Russia’s foreign ministry stated the deal had been terminated “at the initiative of the US” while Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov urged the US to implement a moratorium on deploying intermediate-range nuclear missiles after leaving the INF. Both the US and Russia had signaled their intention to pull out of the Treaty for months, accusing the other of violating the terms of the deal. Pompeo, while announcing the termination of the Treaty, noted the US was “seeking a new era of arms control that moves beyond the bilateral treaties of the past”, and called on Beijing to join discussions. He added, “The United States calls upon Russia and China to join us in this opportunity to deliver real security results to our nations and the entire world.” The INF Treaty, signed in 1987 by then US president Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, limits the use of missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometres and was considered a cornerstone of the global arms control architecture.

On August 2, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged Asian countries to shun China until it revamps its protectionist and predatory policies during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers meeting in Bangkok.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused China for what he argued were predatory trade practices and human rights abuses. In response to China’s drive into Southeast Asia, Pompeo stated, “We’re not building roads to pave over your national sovereignty... We don't fund bridges to close gaps of loyalty”. Pompeo added that Asian nations are best served by private American rather than “state-led” investment. He added that “trade and freedom” are the keys to development and urged countries in the region to shun China until it reforms its practices.
• On August 1, US President Donald Trump once again offered to mediate the Kashmir issue between Pakistan and India.

_Trump offered to mediate on the decades-long Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. Trump had made the same offer on July 22, 2019 during Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit to the Washington. India however, rejected Trump’s offer both times, maintaining the dispute will be resolved bilaterally._

**Latin America**

• On August 11, Alejandro Giammattei, leader of the conservative Vamos Party was elected as President of Guatemala.

_Giammattei secured almost 59% of the vote, and has been a vocal critic of the immigration deal reached between the US and Guatemala. The deal, agreed upon by US President Donald Trump and outgoing Guatemalan President, Jimmy Morales, made Guatemala a so-called “safe third country” for asylum seekers looking to migrate to the US. The Trump Administration threatened Guatemala with sanctions, which resulted in the controversial deal being formalised._

---Kiran Mazari
ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On August 13, Tatiana Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, warned that escalating tensions around the world were “severely jeopardising” the gains on the trajectory of disarmament and non-proliferation made during the last 40 years.

Valovaya said, “In reality, the current escalation of tensions globally is severely jeopardising the acquis of disarmament, non-proliferation and the entire body of the existing instruments.” She indicated that new scientific technological developments and dynamics were challenging international security. Regarding issues discussed at the CD, she noted, “For us to move forward and get things done to deliver on the important mandate bestowed on this body, we must ensure that the Conference does what it was intended to do, and to negotiate and agree new instruments governing complex, sensitive and urgent issues of national and international security, issues that impact on every living being on this planet.” She also urged Member States of the CD to take measures to tackle global threats to peace.


North Korean official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), said that Kim expressed satisfaction over the launches. The report indicated that the missile launches were successful, verifying that the new weapons system was able to perform as designed. The report quoted Kim saying that “the new weapon which was developed to suit the terrain condition of our country and as required by the Juche-oriented war methods has advantageous tactical character different to the existing weapon systems.” The South Korean military also confirmed the launches. South Korea’s military noted that two ballistic missiles flew to a range of 400 kilometres at a speed of 6.1 times the speed of sound. According to defence experts, the new missiles appeared to be canisterised, short-range, solid-fuel ballistic missiles. The missile launches marked the fifth tests of short-range ballistic missiles or multiple rocket launchers since late July 2019.

A few hours before the test on August 10, 2019, US President Donald Trump issued a statement noting that North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un, had offered a “small apology” for launching short-range missiles, and wanted to begin a dialogue with the US. Trump also indicated that he had received a three-page letter from Kim. While Referring to the North Korean leader, Trump said, “He stated, very nicely, that he would like to meet and start negotiations as soon as the joint US-South Korea joint exercises are over.” He added, “It was also a small apology for testing the short-range missiles, and that this testing would stop when the exercises end.”
Earlier, on August 6, 2019, North Korea launched two short-range ballistic missiles with an aim to send a warning to the US and South Korea over their joint military exercises. The KCNA said that the missiles were launched from a western airfield.

- On August 9, Russia’s state-run nuclear corporation Rosatom noted that five of its scientists died and three were injured while working on an experimental “isotope power source” when it exploded.

A statement issued by Rosatom noted, “The tragedy happened while working with the engineering and technical support of the isotope power source in a liquid propulsion system.” The company did not provide any details about the project. However, US nuclear experts believe that isotope power source may be associated with a nuclear-powered cruise missile called Burevestnik, also known to NATO as SSC-X-9 Skyfall, that the Russian President Vladimir Putin first announced publicly in 2018. According to media reports, the accident occurred near the village of Nyonoksa, in the north-western Russian region of Arkhangelsk on August 8, 2019. Reuters reported on August 10, 2019, that “a spokeswoman for Severodvinsk, a city near the test site in the Arkhangelsk region, was quoted in a statement on the municipal website as saying that a short-term spike in background radiation was recorded at noon on August 8, 2019. The statement was not on the site on August 9, 2019.” US based nuclear experts believe that the explosion and the radiation release resulted from an accident during the testing of a nuclear-powered cruise missile at a facility.

- On August 6, Iran unveiled three new precision-guided air-to-air missiles.

- On August 3, Iran’s Foreign Minister Javad Zarif warned that Iran would take another step to reduce its compliance with its July 2015 Nuclear Agreement, known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), if the EU failed to protect Iran from the US sanctions.

While hailing the launch of new missiles as “another significant achievement of power and dignity for the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Defence Minister Brigadier-General Amir Hatami said, “It shows that despite the viciousness and conspiracies of the Great Satan America and its mercenaries, the Defence Ministry will not hesitate for a moment to defend the Islamic republic and to expand security.” The missiles are named “Yasin”, “Balaban” and a new series of the “Ghaem.” According to Fars News Agency, the Yasin missile is a smart, guided missile with folding wings that can be fired from a range of 50 kilometres of its target from manned or unmanned aircraft. The Balaban is also a guided missile, equipped with folding wings and could be mounted under an aircraft, while the Ghaem was a heat-seeking missile.

On August 3, 2019, Iran warned that it would further reduce its compliance with the JCPOA. Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said, “We have said that if the deal is not completely implemented by others then we will also implement it in the same incomplete manner. And of course, all of our actions have been within the framework of the deal.” Endorsing Javad Zarif’s statement,
Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, said, “What is certain is that by putting aside or suspending our commitments we will increase the speed of our nuclear activities.” However, he did not specifically mention what steps would Iran take in further reducing its commitments to the JCPOA. Earlier, on July 1, 2019, Iran took its first step of reducing its commitment by passing the country’s enriched uranium stockpile of 300-kilogramme limit permitted by the JCPOA. Iran had pledged to keep scaling back their commitments every 60 days unless Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia protected it from the punishing sanctions imposed by the US following its withdrawal. On July 8, 2019, Iran’s Atomic Energy Organisation announced that Iran passed the uranium enrichment limit set in the JCPOA. Iran enriched uranium by 4.5%, beyond the 3.67% that the JCPOA allows.

- On August 5, India test-fired its indigenously developed Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QRASM) from a launch site in the eastern Indian state of Odisha.

While calling the test successful, India’s Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said, “The air defence system, QRSAM, was test-fired from a mobile truck-based launch unit.” Jointly manufactured by Bharat Electronics Limited and Bharat Dynamics Limited, the air defence system is meant to replace the Indian Army’s Soviet-sourced SA-8 and SA-6 SAMs. The interceptor has a range of 30 kilometre, and is based on solid fuel propellant.


US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo noted in a statement, “The US withdrawal pursuant to Article XV of the Treaty takes effect today because Russia failed to return to full and verified compliance through the destruction of its noncompliant missile system—the SSC-8 or 9M729 ground-launched, intermediate-range cruise missile.” Pompeo said that Russia was solely responsible for the Treaty’s demise, alleging that the country “developed, produced, flight tested, and has now fielded multiple battalions of its noncompliant missile.” In response to the US’ statement, Russia’s Foreign Ministry said on August 2, 2019, that the Treaty has been terminated “at the initiative of the US”. The Ministry noted, “The denunciation of the INF Treaty confirms that the US has embarked on destroying all international agreements that do not suit them for one reason or another” The statement added, “This leads to the actual dismantling of the existing arms control system.” Earlier, on July 3, 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a legislation on the suspension of the INF Treaty. The legislation noted, “Given the need to take urgent measures following the United States’ violation of its obligations under the Treaty, signed by the Soviet Union and the United States on December 8, 1987, Russia’s compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is hereby suspended until the US addresses the violation of obligations under the Treaty or until the Treaty is terminated.”

On February 2, 2019, the US announced suspension of its compliance with the INF Treaty and provided its six-month notice. In response to the US, Russia had announced suspension of its compliance on February 3, 2019. The US claims that the 9M729 ground-launched cruise missile
(GLCM) has a range capability that exceeds the 500 kilometres limit stipulated by the INF Treaty and demanded Russia eliminate all these missiles. However, Russia stressed that the 9M729 missile did not violate the INF Treaty as the range of the missile falls below the INF Treaty limits. Moreover, Russia also accused the US of violating the agreement. Russia maintains that the US missile defence interceptor platforms deployed in Eastern Europe could be used for offensive purposes, and therefore, is in violation of the Treaty. Signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, the INF Treaty led to the elimination of an entire class of destabilising nuclear weapons that were deployed in Europe and helped bring an end to the Cold War arms race, as it banned ground-launched nuclear and conventional ballistic missiles with ranges between 500 to 5,500 kilometres.

In response to collapse of the INF Treaty on August 2, 2019, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg termed the Treaty’s end a “serious setback.” Stoltenberg said, “We regret that Russia has shown no willingness and taken no demonstrable steps to return to compliance with its international obligations.” He also reaffirmed that NATO would protect its allies and would take the necessary measures to retain credible defence.

Following the demise of the INF Treaty, US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper said that he was in favour of placing ground-launched, intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM) in Asia. Esper noted, “We would like to deploy a capability sooner rather than later.” However, he also cautioned that deploying IRBMs take longer time. Meanwhile, senior US officials also noted that any deployment of such weaponry would be years away.

However, Vladimir Putin warned on August 5, 2019, that Russia would be forced to develop short and intermediate-range land-based nuclear missiles if the US started doing so. Putin said, “If Russia obtains reliable information whereby the US completes the development of these systems and starts to produce them, Russia will have no option other than to engage in a full-scale effort to develop similar missiles.” While blaming the US for the collapse of the INF Treaty, Russian President urged the US to resume arms control talks to prevent an uncontrolled arms race breakout. Putin noted, “In order to avoid chaos with no rules, restrictions, or laws, we need to once more weigh up all the dangerous consequences and launch a serious and meaningful dialogue free from any ambiguity.” He added, “Russia considers that it is necessary to revive without delay meaningful talks on ensuring strategic stability and security. We are ready to engage in these efforts.”

Meanwhile, China also warned on August 6, 2019, that the country would respond and would take countermeasures if the US deployed IRBMs in the Asia Pacific. Fu Cong, Director of the Foreign Ministry’s Arms Control Department, said, “China will not stand idly by and be forced to take countermeasures should the US deploy intermediate-range ground-based missiles this part of the world.” Fu said that China was concerned about US Defence Secretary’s statement and his plans to develop and test a land-based intermediate-range missile in the Asia Pacific.
said that the demise of the INF Treaty would have a “direct negative impact on the global strategic stability.”

In a related development on August 5, 2019, Australia announced that the country would not provide a base for the US short and intermediate-range missiles. Following talks with American officials in Sydney, Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds said that “while the locations for the missile bases were not yet known, Australia would not be one of them.” Reynolds said, “Esper made no such request, and no such request was expected from the US.” Prime Minister Scott Morrison also confirmed that the US IRBMs would not be based in Australia. Meanwhile, on August 5, 2019, South Korean Defence Ministry also stressed that South Korea had had no discussions with the US on the possible deployment of US intermediate-range missiles on its soil. Defence Ministry noted, “Our government did not have any official discussions with the US on the possible introduction of intermediate missiles. We have not internally reviewed the issue and have no plan to do so.”

--- Moiz Khan
China

- On August 9, China said it supported Pakistan’s decision to approach the UN Security Council regarding India’s decision to revoke Article 370 of its Constitution that gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

> During his meeting with his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, “China is seriously concerned about the latest escalation of tensions in Kashmir. The Kashmir issue is a dispute left from the colonial history. It should be properly and peacefully resolved based on the UN Charter, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreement. China believes that unilateral actions that will complicate the situation should not be taken.”

- On August 6, China said it will take countermeasures if the US deploys intermediate-range missiles in the Asia-Pacific region.

> The statement from the Director of the Foreign Ministry’s Arms Control Department, Fu Cong, follows the US’s withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty on August 2, 2019, a move Fu said would have a “direct negative impact on the global strategic stability.” Fu said China was particularly concerned about announced plans to develop and test a land-based intermediate-range missile in the Asia-Pacific. He further added that “China will not stand idly by and be forced to take countermeasures should the US deploy intermediate-range ground-based missiles this part of the world.”

- On August 2 and 3, the 8th Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Intersessional Ministerial Meeting was held in Beijing.

> The Ministers from the 16 RCEP Participating Countries (RPCs) gathered to review developments in the RCEP negotiations since the Ministers last met in March 2019. The Meeting was opened by Hu Chunhua, Vice Premier of the People’s Republic of China, and was chaired by Jurin Laksanawisit, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce of Thailand. The Ministers stressed that it is in the region’s collective interest and highest priority to conclude a modern, comprehensive, and mutually beneficial RCEP in 2019.

- On August 1, US President Donald Trump said he would impose an additional 10% tariff on $300 billion worth of Chinese goods.

> The new tariffs, due to take effect on September 1, 2019, will effectively tax all Chinese imports to the US. China’s Foreign Minister, Wang Yi criticised the US move and said that “adding tariffs is definitely not a constructive way to resolve economic and trade frictions, it’s not the correct way.” In a related development, on August 7, 2019, US President Donald Trump said his
tough stance on China’s economic and trade policies would eventually benefit the American economy. However, on August 13, 2019, Trump announced he will differ imposing the additional tariffs on China for at least four months.

- According to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, on August 1, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the US has no desire to contain China but is keen to see “smooth progress” in their trade negotiations.

The officials met on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional forum in Bangkok, where Wang said that “with regards to the recent problems and disturbance to people-to-people exchanges, Pompeo said very clearly that the US welcomes and supports the flow of people between the two countries.” According to Xinhua, China’s official news agency, Wang told Pompeo in the meeting that “any attempts to contain China’s development are untenable”. Xinhua also reported that “Wang Yi has also made clear China’s positions on the South China Sea, Xinjiang and Hong Kong and urged the US side to choose its words to respect the core interests and major concerns of the Chinese side.”

South Korea

- On August 12, South Korea removed Japan from a list of nations receiving preferential treatment in trade.

The move came in response to Tokyo’s August 2, 2019 decision to eliminate South Korea from the list of countries authorised to receive preferential treatment in trade. South Korea’s Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy stated that Japan would be placed in a newly established third category in which the approval process would be extended to between 5 and 15 days.

In a related development, on August 9, 2019, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper met with senior South Korean leaders and reiterated the significance of the alliance between South Korea and the US. South Korean Defence Minister, Jeong Kyeong-doo, during his meeting with Esper, said Japan’s export restrictions against South Korea were “causing adverse effects on South Korea-Japan relations and security cooperation among South Korea, the US and Japan.” South Korea has said that given its trade dispute with Japan, it was considering the option of scrapping the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) which facilitates three-way intelligence gathering with Washington.

North Korea

- According to South Korea’s Military, on August 10, North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles into the sea off its eastern coast.
According to Defence officials in Seoul, two short-range ballistic missiles were fired from near the northeastern city of Hamhung. The latest launch comes after US President Donald Trump, on August 10, 2019 said he had received a “very beautiful letter” from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un had apologised over a recent spate of missile tests. Trump also added that Kim wanted to resume denuclearisation talks as soon as US-South Korean military exercises conclude. North Korea has fired a series of missiles and rockets since Kim and Trump agreed at a meeting on June 30, 2019, to resuscitate stalled denuclearisation talks.

Trump played down the North Korean weapons launches saying, “There have been no nuclear tests. The missile tests have all been short-range. No ballistic missile tests. No long-range missiles.” Trump also said Kim had written in his letter that he was “not happy” about the US-South Korean war games, and that the weapons tests were a response to US-South Korean military drills being held this month. Furthermore, Trump sympathised with Pyongyang’s contempt for joint US-South Korea military exercises by calling the exercises “ridiculous and expensive” in a tweet on August 10, 2019.

Vietnam

- On August 5, the European Union’s Foreign Policy Chief, Federica Mogherini, visited Hanoi for a bilateral visit and met with Vietnam’s Minister of National Defence General Ngo Xuan Lich.

Both sides discussed the development of a defence and security cooperation partnership based on international law and a shared commitment to work together in addressing shared security challenges. They also agreed to increase cooperation in UN peacekeeping operations, as well as cooperation in cyber security.

---Fareeha Shamim
**EUROPE**

- According to the BBC on August 15, UK Opposition leader, Jeremy Corbyn urged the opposition parties and Tory rebels to install him as caretaker PM in order to stop a no-deal Brexit.

> Corbyn plans to delay Brexit, call a snap election and campaign for another referendum. However, Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson said she would not support Corbyn for caretaker Prime Minister. In a separate development, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has refused to negotiate with Brussels until it agrees to change the Brexit withdrawal agreement which it negotiated with his predecessor Theresa May. However, Brussels has made clear that renegotiations were not on the table.

- On August 14, Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen vowed to tighten controls at the Swedish border following two bomb blasts in Copenhagen in August 2019.

> Two Swedish men have been charged over the attacks. Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said “we cannot have a situation where you can travel from Sweden to Denmark and place dynamite in the middle of our capital.” Two explosions hit Copenhagen earlier in August 2019, one at a police station and one outside the national tax agency. One person was injured.

- On August 10, a gunman armed with multiple weapons opened fire in a Mosque in Oslo, injuring one person.

> The assailant was arrested. According to the authorities, the gunman has expressed right-wing sympathies online and has praised figures like Vidkun Quisling, the leader of Norway under Nazi occupation during World War II. The shooting is being investigated as a “possible act of terrorism.” Norway was the scene of one of the worst-ever attacks by a right-wing extremist in July 2011, when 77 people were killed by Anders Behring Breivik.

- On August 10, protests and anti-government rallies began in Moscow after opposition candidates were banned from running in the city’s local election.

> However, a court in Moscow cancelled a decision by the Election Commission to bar a Russian opposition candidate, Sergei Mitrokhin from taking part in the vote. Mitrokhin had been originally denied registration after a district Election Commission claimed his support contained suspect signatures. According to media reports at least 57 potential candidates has been denied permission to contest the Moscow city elections.

- On August 8, at least 5 Russian scientists were killed during a rocket test involving “isotope power sources”. The accident occurred in Arkhangelsk.

> Rosatom, Russia’s main nuclear energy corporation said an explosion was caused by an accident during a test of an “isotope power source for a liquid-fuelled rocket engine”.

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reports while quoting the local authorities claim that there was a brief spike in radiation levels after the explosion.

- Reuters reported on August 5 that the UK had joined the US in a maritime security mission in the Gulf to protect merchant vessels travelling through the Strait of Hormuz.

The US Department of Defence welcomed the British government’s decision. In July 2019 Iran’s Revolutionary Guards seized a British tanker, Stena Impero, near the Strait of Hormuz for alleged marine violations. The development came days after Britain seized an Iranian oil tanker near Gibraltar, accusing it of violating sanctions on Syria. British Foreign Minister, Dominic Raab said Britain’s move does not represent a change in approach to Iran, and the UK remained committed to maintaining the 2015 nuclear deal agreed with Tehran in return for an easing of sanctions.

- On August 13, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy signed a decree offering citizenship to Russians suffering political persecution.

According to a President House statement, Zelenskiy’s decree would apply to citizens of the Russian Federation who had been persecuted for political reasons. They would need to provide a certificate from Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry or a diplomatic mission confirming they were being persecuted in their home country for their political beliefs.

- On August 13, the US and four European countries including Italy, France, Germany and Britain urged Kosovo and Serbia to re-start their dialogue on normalising ties in order to advance their bid for EU membership.

Both parties were urged to remove obstacles and initiate a dialogue. The EU-sponsored dialogues between Belgrade and Pristina was halted in November 2018 when Kosovo introduced a 100% tax on goods produced in Serbia, pledging to remove it only when Belgrade recognises Kosovo as a sovereign state. Serbia still considers Kosovo part of its territory.

- On August 9, the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned a senior US diplomat in Moscow following Washington’s alleged support for an unauthorised rally in the Moscow.

The US Embassy in Moscow published a map on social media showing the proposed route of the march. Russia’s Foreign Ministry reacted to the move, saying “we consider the publication of the route ... as promoting participation in (the protest) and calling for action, which constitutes interference in the internal affairs of our country.” On August 3, 2019, demonstrators gathered in Moscow as a sign of protest to the government’s decision to disqualify a number of opposition candidates from standing in local elections.

- On August 8, Italian Deputy Prime Minister and leader of far-right League party, Matteo Salvini called for a new election saying differences with coalition partners cannot be fixed.
Salvini said that his party would no longer support the alliance with the Five-Star Movement. The League has presented a no-confidence motion in the Senate to bring down its coalition with the Five Star Movement. Salvini, however, says that he is ready to accept a demand by Five Star to approve one of its main policies of reducing the number of parliamentarians from 945 to 600.

- On August 2, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson suffered a setback after his Conservative Party lost to a pro-EU rival in a by-election, reducing his parliamentary majority to just one lawmaker.

The lack of a significant majority makes Johnson’s government vulnerable to an opposition no-confidence vote that could trigger an early general election. However, Johnson has ruled out an election before the country leaves the European Union. Johnson has promised to leave the EU by October 31, 2019, with or without a deal.

- On August 2, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg termed the collapse of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty as a “serious setback.”

Stoltenberg said that Russia has “shown no willingness and taken no demonstrable steps to return to compliance with its international obligations.” He also reaffirmed that NATO would protect its allies and would take the necessary measures to retain credible defence.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer
GLOBAL TERRORISM

- On August 13, the head of the US Homeland Security Department condemned White supremacy and said that white supremacist ideology was helping fuel domestic terrorism in the US.

- On August 4, John Bash, US Attorney for the Western District of Texas, said that Federal prosecutors were treating the August 3, 2019, El Paso mass shooting as a case of domestic terrorism.

On August 3, 2019, a man armed with an assault rifle opened fire at a shopping area in El Paso, in the US state of Texas, killing at least 20 people and wounding 26 others. Law enforcement agencies arrested the suspect outside a Walmart store. They identified the suspect as Patrick Wood Crusius. Crusius confessed on August 9, 2019 of carrying out shooting, and told police that he was targeting Mexicans. Authorities noted that Crusius had written an anti-migrant, white supremacist document pledging that he would stop the “Hispanic invasion of Texas” and “race mixing.” The document was published on the online messaging board 8chan about 20 minutes before the shooting. The document expressed hatred toward immigrants. According to media reports, some of the language in the manifesto “echoed President Donald Trump’s own rhetoric toward immigration.” In a related development on August 4, 2019, a gunman, named Connor Betts, killed nine people including his sister and wounded 17 others when he opened fire in the early morning in Dayton, Ohio. Police arrested Betts but could not confirm that what motivated the attack.

Kevin McAleenen, Acting Secretary at Department of Homeland Security, said, “The attack in El Paso and the violent white supremacist ideology that inspired it offends us all. We must address it with moral clarity, this hate that is domestic terrorism, and it must be resisted together by Americans of all races, ethnicities and faiths.” McAleenen said the attack in El Paso was “motivated by a poisonous and destructive white supremacist extremist ideology.”

Earlier on August 4, 2019, US Attorney John Bash also called the El Paso incident as a case of domestic terrorism. Bash said, “We are going to do what we do to terrorists in this country, which is to deliver swift and certain justice.” He noted that the incident met the statutory definition of domestic terrorism, which may be defined as actions that “violate federal or state criminal law, occur within the US territory and that are intended to intimidate civilians or influence government policy by coercion.” Meanwhile, on August 4, 2019, six former National Security Council senior directors for counterterrorism wrote a joint statement urging the federal government to take domestic terrorism as seriously as international terrorism. The statement noted, “We call on our government to address this form of terrorism as high a priority as countering international terrorism has become since 9/11.”
• On August 12, China said that escalating anti-government protests in Hong Kong was showing “signs of terrorism” and reiterated its support for the city’s force to take resolute action to tackle “rioters.”

While condemning petrol bomb attacks on police stations by protesters, Yang Guang, a spokesman for the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO) under the State Council, said, “In recent days, Hong Kong’s radical protesters have repeatedly attacked police with highly dangerous tools, which constitute serious violent crimes and have started to show signs of terrorism.” However, Hong Kong police gave a separate briefing; the police reduced the threat level and noted violence seen in the city should not be described as terrorism. Legal experts in Hong Kong said that labelling of protesters’ actions as terrorism could lead to the use of extensive anti-terror laws and powers against them. These comments came after increased violence on August 11, 2019, in Hong Kong with tense clashes between protesters and police in Tsim Sha Tsui, Sham Shui Po, Wan Chai and Kwai Chung. Protests in Hong Kong have now entered into the tenth week which were sparked in opposition to a bill allowing extraditions to the mainland for trial in courts.

• On August 12, a joint counter-terrorism exercise, “Cooperation-2019,” between Chinese People’s Armed Police Force (PAP) and the National Guard of Kyrgyzstan concluded in Urumqi, capital of northwest China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

The joint drill between the two countries was aimed at enhancing joint operational command and combat concerning counter-terrorism, and to promote real combat capabilities. According to Xinhua News report, the exercise was the latest development between the PAP and the National Guard of Kyrgyzstan to implement the consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries to deepen security cooperation. Some 150 officers and soldiers from China and Kyrgyzstan participated in the exercise.

• On August 6, UNSC President, Joanna Wronecka issued a statement condemning a terrorist attack in Cairo, Egypt, in which at least 20 people lost their lives and several others injured on August 4, 2019.

In its statement, the UNSC reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. The UNSC urged states to cooperate actively with the Government of Egypt and all other relevant authorities to help the country in holding perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of acts of terrorism accountable.

On August 4, 2019, an explosive-laden car crashed and caused a huge explosion near Egypt’s National Cancer Institute in central Cairo. While terming the blast a terrorist incident, Egypt’s Interior Ministry said, “It is estimated that the car was being transported to a location for use in the execution of a terrorist operation.” The Ministry alleged Hasam Group for conducting the attack.
• On August 6, Ravina Shamdasani, a spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), noted that armed groups affiliated with terrorist groups including Al Qaeda and Daesh have intensified their activities in Yemen.

Ravina Shamdasani said that activities by terrorist groups have heavily impacted civilians in Yemen since July 25, 2019. Shamdasani noted the OHCHR has verified 19 civilian deaths, and 42 civilians injured, in districts of Taiz, Sa’ada and Aden owing to indiscriminate attacks. An attack in the Al Thabet market area of Sa’ada Governorate on July 29, 2019, left 14 civilians killed and 26 injured. On July 28, 2019, Houthi-affiliated forces allegedly launched indiscriminate attacks, killing one child and injuring three other civilians. Similarly, Al Qaeda and Houthis targeted several areas in Aden and Abyan governorate that also resulted in civilian casualties. Shamdasani urged all parties to the conflict to “seek to de-escalate the situation, and to ensure that any attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice.”

--- Moiz Khan
MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Egypt

- On August 5, at least 20 people were killed and 47 others injured when a car packed with explosives intended for a militant attack blew up outside Cairo’s main cancer hospital.

According to Egypt’s Interior Ministry, “the initial technical examination showed that the car contained explosives, and the collision led to their detonation.” The statement from the Ministry added, “It is estimated that the car was being transported to a location for use in the execution of a terrorist operation.” The Ministry said the Hasm militant group was responsible for rigging up the car. Egypt accuses Hasm, which emerged in 2016 and has claimed several attacks, of being a wing of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood movement denies this and says it seeks change through peaceful means only. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi expressed his condolences to the Egyptian people and the families of the victims. He pledged to eradicate “this brutal terrorism”. Egyptian security forces are waging a counterinsurgency campaign against Islamist militants, some with links to Daesh, that is focused in the north of the Sinai Peninsula.

Iran

- On August 13, Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei held talks with Houthi rebel spokesman, Mohammed Abdul Salam in Tehran.

The meeting took place after southern separatists backed by the UAE seized Yemen’s second city- Aden, on August 10, 2019. The defeat for President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi’s unionist supporters, who have been supported by Saudi Arabia, exposed the divergent interests of the key coalition partners and threatened to weaken their common struggle against the Houthis. Khamenei renewed his support for the rebels, who control the Yemeni capital Sanaa and much of the north, and accused Iran’s rivals of a “plot” to partition the country. According to a statement issued following the talks, Khamenei said, “I declare my support for the mujahidah (struggle) of Yemen.” He also stated, “They seek to divide Yemen. This plot should be strongly resisted and a unified, coherent Yemen with sovereign integrity should be endorsed.” Khamenei said that given “Yemen’s religious and ethnic diversity, protecting Yemen’s integrity requires domestic dialogues”. He further criticised the “Western world’s indifference towards the crimes committed in Yemen.”

- On August 13, Iran said that Britain might release the Iranian oil tanker seized by Royal Marines in the Mediterranean.

Although Iran reported that Britain might release its tanker, an official Gibraltar source stated otherwise. The commandeering of the Iranian Grace 1 vessel on July 4, 2019 exacerbated frictions between Tehran and the West and led to retaliatory moves in Gulf waterways used to ship oil. Britain accused the vessel of violating European sanctions by taking oil to Syria-
charge Tehran denies. The deputy head of Iran’s Ports and Maritime Organisation, Jalil Eslami, said that Britain was thinking of freeing the Grace 1 following an exchange of documents. However, a senior source in the government of British overseas territory denied that would happen. Tehran has denied the vessel was doing anything improper and in retaliation Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps troops seized the British-flagged Stena Impero tanker in the Strait of Hormuz on July 19, 2019 for alleged marine violations. The Gulf tanker crisis has added to worsening hostilities since Washington pulled out of Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal with six world powers.

- On August 1, Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani criticised a US decision to impose sanctions on Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, saying it showed Washington was “afraid” of the Foreign Minister.

The US Treasury said the sanctions would freeze any of Zarif’s assets in the US or controlled by US entities, as well as squeeze his ability to function as a diplomat. During a televised speech, President Rouhani said, “They are afraid of our Foreign Minister’s interviews”, referring to a recent round of interviews Zarif gave to foreign media in New York. He also said, “It is completely clear that the foundations of the White House have been shaken by the words and logic of an informed, devoted and diplomatic individual.” Iran’s Revolutionary Guards called the designation “absurd” and thanked Minister Zarif for his service. The designation of Zarif under the same sanctions already applied to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the latest in a series of US moves against Iran.

In a related development on August 13, 2019, the Secretary General of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, also expressed his support for Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in the wake of US sanctions imposed on him.

Iraq


The Foreign Minister warned that the presence of foreign forces, including Western countries, in the strategic water body will fuel tensions further. Hakim wrote on twitter, “Iraq rejects the participation of Zionist forces in any military force to secure the passage of ships in the (Persian) Gulf. The Gulf littoral states can together secure the transit of ships”. He also said, “Iraq is seeking to reduce tension in our region through peaceful negotiations.” He further warned that “the presence of Western forces in the region will increase tension.” The remarks came a day after Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) warned that any Israeli presence in the Persian Gulf may result in a war in the region, and that the responsibility for the consequences of such illegal presence lies with the US and the UK. Earlier, on August 7, 2019,
Israeli Foreign Minister, Israel Katz said that the regime would be part of the US-led coalition to “protect the security of the Persian Gulf.” He claimed that Israel was determined to stop “Iranian entrenchment” in the Middle East region and strengthen Tel Aviv’s relationship with the Persian Gulf countries.

Libya

- According to Libya’s UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) on August 5, at least 42 people were killed and several others injured in an air strike targeting a town hall meeting in southern Libya. The government accused the forces of military strongman Khalifa Haftar for carrying out the air strike.

According to the GNA, the raid struck the residential district of Qalaa in the town of Murzugin. Municipal council official, Ibrahim Omar said a government building at which more than 200 local dignitaries were gathered “to settle social differences” was targeted three times. According to him, “No armed or wanted people were among them... Haftar bombed unarmed civilians”. He also called for humanitarian aid since the local hospitals could not cope with the high number of casualties. The GNA condemned the attack and blamed it on Haftar’s forces. Haftar, who seized swathes of southern Libya, has been fighting since April 2019 to oust pro-GNA forces from the capital Tripoli. The GNA urged the UN’s Libya mission and international community “to carry out an investigation into the crimes committed by Haftar’s militias in Murzugin”.

Qatar

- On August 12, Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani held talks with Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif in Doha.

During the meeting, Javad Zarif said the Islamic Republic is impervious to the US “economic terrorism,” stressing that such measures taken by the US have only caused insecurity in the region. He also reaffirmed Iran’s policy to expand ties with all its neighbours and praised Tehran-Doha relations as a “model” of political relations among countries in the region. Sheikh Tamim pointed to the close and brotherly relations between Iran and Qatar, underlining the need for bilateral consultations and deliberations concerning regional and international issues as well as a concerted effort to resolve problems in the region. He also expressed Doha’s preparedness to maintain peace and stability in the region.

During his visit to Doha, Minister Javad Zarif warned against an arms race in the Middle East, saying the US has turned the Persian Gulf region into a “tinderbox ready to blow up” by selling weaponry to certain regional countries. Pointing to a recent US decision to form a naval coalition with the declared aim of protecting commercial shipping in the Persian Gulf, Zarif
went on to say that the presence of more warships in the region would only lead to more insecurity.

**Saudi Arabia**

- On August 13, dozens of Saudi troopers and Saudi-sponsored militiamen were killed when Yemeni army soldiers and fighters from allied Popular Committees launched an offensive against their positions in the Kingdom’s southern border region of Najran.

An unnamed Yemeni military source told Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that Yemeni soldiers and allied fighters launched a domestically-developed Zelzal-1 (Earthquake-1) missile at Tayyibah al-Esm military camp, leaving dozens of Saudi mercenaries killed and injured. Separately, over the past two days, Yemeni forces and their allies killed 22 Saudi soldiers in the southwestern region of Jizan, located 967 kilometres southwest of Riyadh. Yemeni army soldiers and Popular Committees fighters had earlier shot and killed eight Saudi troopers at the Alab border crossing of the Asir region. Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi back to power.

**Syria**

- On August 14, militants downed a Syrian regime plane flying over northwest Syria and detained its pilot.

The plane was shot down as it took part in a bombing campaign by the regime against militants. According to Rami Abdel Rahman, Head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, “the pilot has been taken prisoner and is in the hands of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militant group running the Idlib region. According to the HTS, the Russian-made war plane was downed near the town of Al-Tamanaa. The crash site lies east of the near-deserted town of Khan Sheikhun, which lies on a key highway coveted by the regime. After eight years of civil war in Syria, the Idlib region controlled by Syria’s former Al Qaeda affiliate is the last major stronghold of opposition to President Basharal-Assad’s regime. Regime and Russian air strikes, as well as rocket fire, have pounded Idlib for more than three months, killing hundreds and displacing 400,000 people.

In a related development on August 13, 2019, at least 59 combatants were killed during clashes between regime loyalists and insurgents in rebel-held northwest Syria. The HTS militant group led by Syria’s former Al Qaeda affiliate, has since January 2019 controlled most of Idlib province as well as parts of neighbouring Hama, Aleppo and Latakia provinces. Several other armed rebel groups also operate in the region. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, fighting in southern Idlib and rural Latakia claimed the lives of 29 pro-government
forces as well as 30 militants and allied rebels. It happened as regime warplanes carried out air strikes, killing three civilians in the town of Khan Sheikoun.

Turkey

- During a telephonic conversation with his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country is prepared to further enhance its relations with Iran in all fields.

The Iranian President, in turn, said the Islamic Republic of Iran is totally prepared for development of relations with Turkey as a friendly and brotherly country. He also described as necessary the accelerated implementation of earlier agreements between the two states. Iran and Turkey, as major trade partners, plan to increase their annual trade to 30 billion dollars in defiance of the US pressure aimed at isolating Iran’s economy.

- According to Turkish Defence Ministry on August 7, the US and Turkey have agreed to establish a joint operation centre to manage tensions between US-backed Kurdish militia and Turkish Forces in northern Syria.

According to the Turkish Defence Ministry, Ankara had agreed with US officials to “implement without delay the first measures aimed at eliminating Turkey’s concerns. In that framework, to quickly create in Turkey a joint operation centre to coordinate and manage the implementation of the safe zone with the US.” The Ministry also stated that Turkey’s ultimate aim was to create a “peace corridor” that can “ensure that our Syrian brothers will be able to return to their country”. The announcement came after three days of tense negotiations with US officials hoping to prevent a Turkish attack on the Kurdish YPG group, which controls large swathes of northern Syria. Turkey sees the YPG as a terrorist offshoot of the Kurdish PKK, which has fought a bloody insurgency inside its territory for the past 35 years. Ankara has stepped up threats in recent days to launch an offensive against the YPG.

Yemen

- On August 10, clashes erupted overnight at the Fourth Brigade camp in Aden killing at least 45 people.

According to military sources, Southern separatists gained ground across Yemen's second city Aden and surrounded the presidential palace amid fierce clashes with loyalist forces. According to analysts, the deadly fighting reflects deep divisions between secessionists and forces backing the internationally recognised government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. The clashes have pitted unionist fighters against a force which is dominated by combatants seeking renewed independence for the south. The force, known as the Security Belt, overran three military
barracks belonging to unionist forces and were surrounding the presidential palace. Fierce clashes were also taking place in several other parts of the city. The International Crisis Group think tank warned that the latest clashes “threaten to tip southern Yemen into a civil war within a civil war”.

- On August 2, Al Qaeda gunmen killed 19 soldiers in an attack on an army base in southern Yemen, a day after deadly assaults by rebels.

According to Yemeni security officials, the gunmen stormed Al-Mahfad base in Abyan province and remained inside for several hours before military reinforcements came, adding that the soldiers were killed in clashes with the jihadists. A government security official said, “The Qaeda gunmen took advantage of what happened in Aden and launched an assault on Al-Mahfad base and clashed with soldiers”.

In a related development on August 1, 2019, separate attacks by Shia rebels and a suicide bomber killed at least 49 people in Yemen’s government-held second city of Aden. The attacks were the first to hit Aden in more than a year and dealt a heavy blow to the government’s reorganised security forces, which have been trained and equipped by the UAE.

---Muhammad Shoaib
SOUTH ASIA: I

Pakistan
External

- On August 5, the government of India abrogated Article 370 of its Constitution enabling non-Kashmiris to buy land, hold local government jobs and secure scholarships in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). The Indian government also decided to split IOK into two union territories, Jammu and Kashmir, which would have a legislature, and Ladakh, which would be ruled directly by the central government without a legislature of its own.

- On August 5, the Government of Pakistan said that it would “exercise all possible options to counter the illegal steps” taken by the Indian government in IOK and warned New Delhi of attempting to “change the demography of Kashmir through ethnic cleansing.” Pakistan insists that Kashmir is an internationally recognised disputed territory and that “no unilateral step by the India can change this disputed status, as enshrined in the UNSC resolutions.”

- On August 6, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that India’s decision to abrogate Article 370, is in line with India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) “racist ideology”. The Premier called for “intervention” from the international community. He was delivering a policy statement during a joint session of the Parliament that was called on to discuss India’s decision to abrogate Article 370 in IOK. Khan claimed the BJP acted upon the ideology of its founding fathers, who wanted India only for Hindus and wanted to ensure that Muslims are treated as second-class citizens in India. Khan said that despite Pakistan government’s repeated calls for bilateral talks, there are no headways because India is not interested in dialogue with Pakistan.

- On August 7, Pakistan’s government announced its decision to downgrade diplomatic relations, expel the Indian High Commissioner and suspend bilateral trade with India in the wake of New Delhi’s move to alter the status for Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan has also decided to review bilateral agreements with India. Pakistan has informed the Indian government that it would not send its High Commissioner to India. The decision came after Prime Minister Imran Khan chaired a meeting of the National Security Committee (NSC).

- On August 8, Pakistan decided to approach the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) against India’s move to alter the status of IOK. Pakistan’s government had also requested UNSC President to convene an emergency meeting of the Council to discuss India’s “illegal actions” that “violate UN resolutions on Kashmir”.

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On August 14, Prime Minister Imran Khan threatened to “teach India a lesson” in case it commits any act of aggression inside Pakistan. He said that Pakistan Army has “solid information that India is planning to do something in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).” The Prime Minister warned India that if it committed any misadventure…Pakistan would fight until the end”.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had long opposed Article 370 and revoking it was in the party’s 2019 election manifesto. BJP argues it needed to be scrapped to integrate Kashmir with the rest of India. The move has provoked outrage in Pakistan and worries of a fresh armed conflict in IOK. These fears were heightened after India moved additional 38,000 troops into the region. There are reports of massive clampdowns by the Indian authorities who have detained prominent local Kashmiris politicians and party workers. People in IOK remain without landlines, mobiles or internet access. The Indian government has imposed a communications blackout and restrictions on movement in IOK due to which there is a lack of independent information about the situation in Kashmir. The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres also warned the world against rising tensions between nuclear-armed states. Meanwhile, India has dismissed Pakistan’s reaction over its move in Kashmir and warned against interfering in what it insisted was an internal matter.

In a related development on August 10, 2019, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi visited Beijing and held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. During the discussion, Wang Yi said China fully supports Pakistan’s decision to go to UNSC over Kashmir. Wang Yi also stressed that Indian steps could jeopardise the peace and stability in the region.

On August 13, Russia asked Pakistan to bilaterally resolve its dispute with India over Kashmir.

The message was conveyed to Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi from his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov during a telephonic conversation. Foreign Minister Qureshi telephoned the Russian Foreign Minister to apprise him of heightened tensions between Pakistan and India after the latter revoked autonomous status of IOK on August 5, 2019.

According to Dawn on August 7, US officials asked Pakistan to enhance efforts against banned organisations and their leaderships.

The development follows a US delegation visit to Islamabad aimed at assessing Pakistan’s steps, actions and measures identified during the meetings of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in June 2019. Pakistani officials insist that Islamabad had taken significant steps to meet the FATF requirements relating to anti-money laundering and countering terror financing.

On August 1, US President Donald Trump reiterated his offer to mediate the Kashmir dispute saying that he would “certainly intervene” to resolve this 70-year-old dispute if asked to do so.
Pakistan has welcomed the US President’s offer, meanwhile, India insists it would not accept any third-party mediation on its disputes with Pakistan. On July 22, 2019, US President Donald Trump said that he is ready to mediate the Kashmir dispute adding that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked him to be a “mediator or arbitrator in Kashmir”.

- On August 1, Pakistan’s government offered the Indian government consular access to Kulbhushan Jadhav, the Indian spy sentenced by Pakistan on charges of espionage and terrorism.

Pakistan’s Foreign Office said the decision has been taken in accordance with verdict of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In its verdict in July 2019, the ICJ ruled that Jadhav be allowed consular access immediately and asked Pakistan to ensure “effective review and reconsideration of his conviction and sentences”.

Pakistan Internal

- According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on August 3, the Indian Army used cluster ammunition on 30th and 31st July 2019 targeting the civilian population in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

According to the Pakistan Military, Indian actions are a violation of the Geneva Convention and international law. The attack killed two civilians, including a 4-year-old boy. The Indian Army rejected Pakistan’s claims of using cluster ammunition along the LoC saying “such responses are only against military targets and infiltrating terrorists who are aided by Pakistan Army.” Meanwhile, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said it was deeply concerned over the deteriorating situation in IOK, including use of banned cluster munition by the Indian forces to target civilians.

- On August 5, at least two personnel of the Pakistan Army including a major were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside remote-controlled bomb in Bajaur.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack. In a related development on August 2, 2019, at least four soldiers were killed following terrorist attacks on security forces in North Waziristan.

India

- Addressing a gathering on August 15, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his decision to revoke the special status of Indian Occupied Kashmir would restore the region to its “past glory.”
Narendra Modi criticised the Indian opposition parties who opposed the abrogation of Article 370, accusing them of “playing politics”. The Indian Prime Minister said that previous governments were reluctant to take such “bold step” because they were worried about their political future. Narendra Modi also revealed that India would now have a Chief of Defence Staff who would have authority over all three of India’s Armed Forces.

- On August 12, Indian External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing.

During his meeting with Jaishankar, Yi said Beijing was “highly concerned” about the current situation in Kashmir and the escalated conflict between Pakistan and India after New Delhi’s decision to revoke IOK of its special status. Wang Yi told the Indian External Affairs Minister that such a move would “trigger regional tension”. China says that the Indian government’s announcement of the establishment of the Ladakh Union Territory, “which involves Chinese territory, has posed a challenge to China’s sovereignty and violated the two countries’ agreement on maintaining peace and stability in the border region.”

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer
Afghanistan

- On August 15, Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi extended his wishes to Afghans during his Independence Day speech.

Modi said, “Afghanistan is a good neighbour of India, and I wish the country for celebrating 100 years of independence this year.” He also said that India is strongly fighting against those who are spreading terrorism while adding, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka are also affected by terrorism. Modi called on all countries in the world to come together to fight terrorism. Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani also congratulated Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said he called India a close friend of Afghanistan. India’s Independence Day has been celebrated as a “Black Day” across Kashmir and Pakistan after India unilaterally annexed occupied Kashmir through a presidential order on August 5, 2019. India’s move is in direct violation of international law and has been condemned by the international community and media.

- On August 14, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani outlined his government’s stance on the upcoming talks with the Taliban.

Ghani said that a joint statement would be announced on the first day of negotiations with the Taliban, which will define the Afghan government as a legitimate government representing all the people of Afghanistan. He said the statement would also define the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces as a legitimate partner of the international forces in the fight against terrorism. Ghani emphasised that there would be no compromise on Afghan National Defence and Security Forces when it comes to negotiations with the Taliban. He also said, “A new agreement between us (Afghan government) and the US is not considered. I repeat, a new agreement is not considered. All international agreements will remain in their place.” Ghani made clear that an agreement that does not ensure the sovereignty of Afghanistan would not be acceptable. On August 11, 2019, the Taliban negotiators and the US concluded the eighth round of peace talks in Qatar. The two sides are expected to sign a peace agreement within the next few days which will provide the ground for US troop withdrawal and reduction of violence in Afghanistan. The peace deal will also facilitate intra-Afghan negotiations that will probably take place within the next few weeks.

- On August 13, at least 11 people were taken out of their homes and killed by a special unit of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Zurmat district of Paktia province.

The NDS in a statement said that at least 11 militants, including two Taliban commanders were killed during a special operation in Zurmat district. However, tribal elders and residents rejected this statement. They also called for a response from the NDS to provide documents and accurate information about those who were killed.

- On August 13, the US and NATO Forces Commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Scott Miller rejected reports of limitations in US operations in the country.
Quoting senior Pentagon officials, Newsweek reported on August 12, 2019, that US personnel have been ordered to limit nearly all offensive combat operations against the Taliban and cease advising the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. The report also mentioned that the Trump Administration has proposed cutting US troop strength in Afghanistan by nearly half to 6,000 as a means of finalising technical details among Taliban leadership. Gen. Miller said this article was “inaccurate and speculative”, citing unnamed sources that are likely as far from the subject as they are from Afghanistan itself.

- On August 12, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported that the ongoing peace talks have not been able to diminish the intensity of violence in Afghanistan.

According to the ICRC report the air bombardments, night raids, and attacks conducted in both rural and populated areas result in the killing and maiming of innocent men, women and children. The ICRC called on all parties to the conflict to protect and respect medical workers. Attacks against health care providers and facilities are extremely high, with 59 incidents in the first half of 2019. The ICRC is also deeply concerned about the fate of people detained by all sides in the conflict.

- On August 11, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani said during his Eid address that prominent Afghan politicians had asked him to remain in power for another five years or more, without an election, until the fate of the ongoing peace process is made clear.

Ghani said the politicians made the suggestion during a meeting with US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, during his last visit to Kabul. Ghani also said he rejected the offer. He stressed that people will decide on the legitimacy of the future government through votes. Members of Ghani’s election campaign team attended the Eid prayers at the Presidential Palace. Former jihadi leaders and other politicians however were not seen during the ceremony. The presidential elections are scheduled for September 2019.

- On August 11, Taliban negotiators and US wrapped up the eighth round of talks in Doha.

Since October 2018, peace talks are underway to reach a potential peace deal that will help reduce violence in Afghanistan, facilitate intra-Afghan talks and a ceasefire between the warring sides. US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad called the latest round of talks “very productive”. He also said that the US is “working hard toward a lasting and honorable peace agreement and a sovereign Afghanistan which poses no threat to any other country”. A Taliban spokesman said in a tweet that negotiators from the two sides are now reaching their leaders to consult about the details of the topics which came under discussion in the recent talks between the US Special Representative and the Taliban delegation. Many experts opine that an agreement is expected to be signed in the near future in the presence of representatives of neighbouring and regional countries including delegations from NATO and the international community.

- On August 9, Pakistan’s Ambassador to Afghanistan, Zahid Nasrullah Khan said that India-Pakistan tensions over Kashmir would not affect the Afghan peace process.
Khan told Afghan media during a press briefing in Kabul, “While Pakistan and the international community is focused on the resolution of the Afghan conflict, India has chosen this time to destabilise the region.” He added that Kashmir was a longstanding dispute between India and Pakistan and it has nothing to do with the conflict in Afghanistan. On August 12, 2019, Pakistan’s Ambassador to the US, Asad Majeed Khan during an interview with the New York Times editorial board emphasised that the Kashmir and Afghanistan issues were separate and that he was not attempting to link them. He also said that Pakistan hoped the US talks with the Taliban would succeed and that his country was actively supporting them. In a related development, Anadolu News Agency reported on August 8, 2019, that the Taliban said that the India-Pakistan rift over Kashmir should not be linked with the situation in Afghanistan. On August 5, 2019, India revoked Article 370 and stripped Kashmir from its special status. India’s unilateral annexation of occupied Kashmir through a presidential order is in direct violation of international law and has been condemned by the international community and media. India’s move

- On August 9, the Afghan Defence Ministry said it killed at least 34 militants in airstrikes in Logar province.

- On August 2, at least 19 militants, including 17 fighters affiliated to al-Qaeda, were killed during an operation by Afghan forces in Charkh district in Logar Province.

- On August 1, a Taliban offensive left at least 8 Afghan police force members dead and 10 others wounded in the central Daikundi province.

According to the provincial Governor of Daikundi, two check posts also fell to the Taliban in this attack on August 1, 2019. In a related incident on August 5, 2019, at least four people were killed and 25 others wounded as a result of an IED explosion in Herat. In another incident on August 1, 2019, a Taliban bomb attack left at least two policemen dead in Kabul city. Bomb blasts across the country and clashes between the Taliban and Afghan Security Forces appear to have increased amid peace talks. On August 3, 2019, the district governor of Zenda Jan district in the western province of Herat was killed in a roadside bomb blast. On August 4, 2019, Taliban’s designated deputy governor for Panjshir Province and five fighters of the group were killed by Afghan forces. In another development on August 11, 2019, the Taliban killed the newly-appointed police chief for Charchino district of central Uruzgan province.

- On August 6, the Taliban warned Afghans to avoid attending election campaign gatherings.

The insurgent group ordered their fighters to target campaign rallies throughout the country and prevent the “fake” process of elections. Taliban claimed that the 2014 presidential elections were marred by direct interference by the US, and were brokered by the former US Secretary of State John Kerry, while the people’s votes were ignored. The group said that the election in Afghanistan has no legitimacy in the presence of foreign forces in the country. The group called on all stakeholders to use their energy and resources in supporting a real peace in the country so
that the peace process is not affected at this sensitive phase. One of the key issues between the Taliban and Afghan leaders during the ongoing peace process has been the nature and type of future governance system for the country. The Taliban have been insisting on establishing an Islamic Emirate. However, on August 5, 2019, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani once again reiterated that Afghans have a “quite simple” choice on the future government, and that is an Islamic Republic.

- During a meeting with Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds in Sydney on August 4, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo reiterated that US President Donald Trump is seeking a political solution which will pave the ground for troop reduction in Afghanistan.

Pompeo said, “(US) President (Donald) Trump has made very clear that his desire is that we develop a diplomatic resolution that permits us to reduce the resources that are located in the country, while simultaneously ensuring that Afghanistan never again becomes a platform (from) where terror can strike the United States of America.” Reynolds meanwhile said the Afghan war has a political solution and that his country’s stance on Afghanistan is dependent on the results of the peace process and presidential election. In a related development on August 2, 2019, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that he strongly supports and welcomes the talks which are now taking place between the US and the Taliban. He added, “We have to do whatever we can to preserve the gains we have made in Afghanistan – to avoid Afghanistan becoming a safe haven once again for international terrorists and to maintain the enormous social and economic progress which has been made in Afghanistan, not least when it comes to the rights of women.” Stoltenberg said that there are many challenges ahead but he welcomes the fact that “we are making progress in the dialogue with Taliban”. He also reiterated that the US and NATO will make decisions on their future presence together and when the time is right, they will leave together.


Khalilzad briefed Pakistani officials on the Afghan peace process. He also discussed Pakistan’s role in support of the peace process and additional positive steps they can take. The Pakistani leadership also assured the country’s full support for the peace process by emphasising that peace in Afghanistan is essential not only for a prosperous Pakistan but for the stability of the entire region.

---Kashif Hussain
UNITED NATIONS

- On August 13, President of the UNSC, Joanna Wronecka, hailed the 1949 Geneva Conventions as a “significant body of law”, and said that it was playing “a vital role in limiting brutality of armed conflicts.”

- On August 3, Pakistan’s Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) noted that India violated Geneva Conventions and international law by using cluster munitions to target the civilian population in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) across the Line of Control (LOC).

In commemorating the 70th anniversary of the landmark Geneva Conventions, Poland’s Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz, speaking for his nation which holds the Presidency of the Council for August 2019, said, “As they are ratified and acceded by almost every State of the world, the principles and legal norms enshrined in these Conventions are also recognised as customary international humanitarian law (IHL) and are universally applicable.” He asserted, “The greatest challenge to protecting human life in modern conflict is observance of and respect for the existing rules by the armed forces and non-State armed groups.” However, he noted that development of new weapons based on Artificial Intelligence technology and autonomous weapon systems were reducing the role and control of human factors during wartime. He said that these systems were violating the general rules of IHL prohibiting indiscriminate and inhumane weapons. He also expressed concerns over increased role of non-state actors and IHL legal loopholes which have put international humanitarian principles under pressure.

In a related development on August 3, 2019, Pakistan’s ISPR indicated that the Indian Army used cluster munitions and targeted civilian population in the AJK on July 30 and 31, 2019. The attack left two civilians, including a 4-year-old boy, dead and 11 others were critically injured. The statement said that the attack constituted a violation of the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law. The ISPR also urged the international community to take notice of blatant Indian violations of international laws through their targeting innocent citizens.

- On August 8, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged all parties to the Kashmir dispute to refrain from taking steps that could affect the status of Jammu and Kashmir, which is recognised as a disputed territory by the UNSC.

While calling for ‘maximum restraint’ over the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, Guterres said that he had been following the situation in Jammu and Kashmir “with concern.” The position of the UN on this region is governed by the Charter of the UN and applicable Security Council resolutions. The Secretary-General recalled the 1972 Simla Agreement on bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, which states that the final status of Jammu and Kashmir is to be settled by peaceful means, in accordance with the UN Charter. He also expressed concerned
over reports of restrictions in the Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK), which could exacerbate the human rights situation in the region. Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General, Stephane Dujarric said that Guteres had received a letter from the Pakistani Foreign Minister on the situation in Kashmir. Dujarric said, “It will be circulated as a document of the Security Council, as requested, and we’re obviously studying very closely the content of the letter.”

On August 6, 2019, UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) noted that the Indian Government’s decision to revoke part of the Constitution relating to the special status of Indian-administered Kashmir risked worsening democratic freedoms in the region. A statement issued by the OHCHR noted, “We are seeing again blanket telecommunications restrictions – perhaps more blanket than we’ve ever seen before - the reported arbitrary detention of political leaders and restrictions on peaceful assembly. These restrictions will prevent the people of Indian Administered Kashmir and their elected representatives from participating fully in democratic debate about the future status of Jammu and Kashmir.”

On August 5, 2019, the Indian government repealed article 370 and article 35A of its Constitution through a Presidential Order, which revoked the special status of the IOJK. The Presidential Order overruled prevailing 1954 Presidential Order and nullified all the provisions of autonomy granted to the state. The article 35A allowed local legislature in the IOK to define permanent residents of the region and abstained outsiders from permanently buying property, settling and holding government jobs. Revoking of the article would now open doors for outsiders to settle in the IOK and change its demography.

• On August 8, Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said a new set of unilateral sanctions imposed by the US on Venezuela would have a “potentially severe impact” on the human rights in Venezuela.

Bachelet said, “The sanctions are extremely broad and fail to contain sufficient measures to mitigate their impact on the most vulnerable sectors of the population.” She added, “I fear that they will have far-reaching implications on the rights to health and to food in particular, in a country where there are already serious shortages of essential goods.” On August 5, 2019, the US imposed sanctions on Venezuela; freezing the country’s assets in the US and restraining transactions with it. Imposition of sanctions are in line with the US policy of increasing pressure on Venezuela to oust President Nicolas Maduro from power. Tensions in Venezuela intensified when Juan Guaido, head of the country’s National Assembly, challenged the legitimacy of sitting President Nicolas Maduro and called the January 10, 2019, elections fraudulent. Guaido subsequently declared himself interim President of Venezuela and called for fresh elections. President Maduro has been in power since 2013 and was sworn in again for a second term on January 10, 2019. The US and most Latin American countries and Western countries have recognised Guaido as Venezuela’s President and called for Maduro to step down.
On August 2, Virginia Gamba, the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, urged the UNSC to take immediate measures on the “current plight of children affected by armed conflict across the globe.”

While noting that 2019 marked 20 years since the UNSC first passed a resolution on children and armed conflict and the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Virginia Gamba indicated that that 2018 saw “record levels” of verified cases of children killed and maimed. Gamba said, “Regional and sub-regional work is a key element of this direct engagement. High-level political engagement supports the cornerstone of our endeavours; the child protection efforts in situations of armed conflict.” She stressed that the UNSC was required to increase its efforts to ensure that all parties to the conflicts around the world abide by the “principals of distinction, proportionality and military necessity.” She also urged the conflict’s parties to issue “specific command orders that address reducing child casualties.”

--- Moiz Khan