

July 16 – July 31

AREA BRIEF

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**STRATEGIC STUDIES
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Area Briefs: 16-31 July 2019

General Observations

Pakistan

- According to Dawn on July 30 a White House factsheet titled “Working toward Peace and Stability: Building Economic Prosperity” has hinted that the US and Pakistan can further improve bilateral trade if their strategic ties continue to improve. The factsheet reiterated President Donald Trump’s desire to increase trade with Pakistan that he expressed during his July 22 news briefing during PM Imran Khan’s visit to the United States.
- On July 29, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that Pakistan is not a guarantor but only facilitator in the Afghan Peace Process. The onus of responsibility for the success or failure of the Afghan peace process thus lies with all the stakeholders and not Pakistan alone.
- According to the US Department of State on July 26, the Trump Administration approved Foreign Military Sale (FMS) worth \$125 million to Pakistan for providing technical support to the country’s F-16 fleet. According to an anonymous US Department of State official the proposed sale does not mark a change in the Trump Administration’s policy of freezing security assistance to Pakistan. In a separate development, the US also approved \$670 million worth of support for India’s C-17 transport plane fleet. The State Department, however, said that the proposed sale would “not alter the basic military balance in the region.”
- Speaking at the joint press conference with Prime Minister Imran Khan in Washington on July 22, US President Donald Trump said he is ready to mediate the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India. President Trump added that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked him to be a “mediator or arbitrator in Kashmir”. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) however denied that Narendra Modi had requested President Trump to play a role of mediator in Kashmir saying “all outstanding issues with Pakistan are discussed only bilaterally.” According to the MEA, “Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration provide the basis to resolve all issues between Pakistan and India bilaterally”. India firmly rejected Trump’s offer, highlighting New Delhi's consistent position that all outstanding issues with Pakistan would be discussed only bilaterally.
- On his part Prime Minister Khan apprised President Trump of the situation in IHK highlighting that a billion people are being “held hostage to (the) Kashmir situation.” He said that Pakistan has made all overtures to India to start a dialogue and resolve differences, however, there is no progress as yet. Both leaders held comprehensive discussions on strengthening the partnership between Pakistan and the US and enhancing

cooperation between the two countries. President Trump said that Pakistan did not respect the US in the past but was now helping a lot now on Afghanistan. The meeting between the two leaders coincided with the Trump Administration's efforts to convince the Afghan Taliban to agree to a cease-fire and hold direct talks with the Afghan government. The US has sought Pakistan's help in bringing the Taliban to the table.

A high-level delegation including Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and DG Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Faiz Hameed accompanied Prime Minister Imran Khan during his Washington's visit.

- On July 23, Prime Minister, Imran Khan addressed members of the US Congress at the Capitol Hill. The Premier also met with US House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi. During the meeting with PM Khan, Pelosi said that the US values the “critical relationship and partnership” with Pakistan.
- On July 24, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited the US State Department and met with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Bajwa also visited Pentagon and met Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Joseph Dunford, acting US Defence Secretary, Richard V. Spencer and the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley. The military leadership of both sides held comprehensive talks on the matters related to security and bilateral military cooperation.
- On July 17, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Pakistan to allow India consular access to Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav after it found that Pakistan breached its obligation under Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. The court, however, rejected India's demand that Jadhav's conviction by a Pakistani military court be annulled.
- On July 30, at least 18 people were killed when a Pakistan Army plane crashed into a residential area in Rawalpindi.
- In a fresh wave of terrorist attacks that consumed the country on July 27, at least 10 personnel of the Pakistan Armed Forces, including a Captain were killed in two separate terrorist attacks, one along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in North Waziristan and the other in Balochistan. Six soldiers of Pakistan Army were killed in North Waziristan when terrorists from the Afghan side of the border attacked their vehicle. In another attack, at least 4 personnel of the Frontier Corps (FC) were killed after terrorists ambushed their vehicle during an operation in Balochistan. In a separate development on July 30, at least 5 people including a police official were killed and 30 others were injured following a

terrorist attack targeting a police vehicle in Quetta. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.

- Pakistan welcomed a special caravan of some 500 Indian Sikh Pilgrims on July 30 to participate in the inaugural ceremony of celebrations of the 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak at Nankana Sahib. Pakistan is actively promoting visits to religious shrines and people-to-people contacts between the two countries. The visas to the Sikh pilgrims have been granted “over and above” thousands of annual visas under the framework of the 1974 Pakistan-India Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines.
- Earlier on July 29, while addressing a gathering on the National Minority Day in Islamabad on July 29, Prime Minister Imran Khan assured the minority communities in the country that the government would protect the places of worship of all religions. The Prime Minister said the forced conversion of religious minorities must stop as it violates Islamic values and the Constitution. While discussing the Sikh community, Imran Khan said that measures have been taken to facilitate them through the Kartarpur Corridor, that is scheduled to be opened in November 2019.
- On July 24, Pakistan’s Foreign Office summoned Indian Deputy High Commissioner, Gaurav Ahluwalia and condemned the ceasefire violations by the Indian troops along the Line of Control (LoC) on July 22 and 23, 2019. The Ceasefire violations are proof of India’s unwillingness to improve bilateral relations with Pakistan. Despite numerous overtures made by Pakistan in the aftermath of Pulwama and the Indian election in May 2019, violations along the LoC have continued unabated. India dismissed President Donald Trump's offer of mediation for resolving the Kashmir issue in very strong words.

International

- On July 29 the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the trust vote after defeating Congress in the Karnataka State Assembly. The development will help BJP to strengthen its support base in Southern India which has long been dominated by regional parties.
- On July 22, India successfully launched its lunar mission, Chandrayaan-2 which would travel for two months before positioning itself in a circular orbit 62 miles above the moon’s surface. If the mission is successful, India would become the fourth country to land on the Moon’s surface. China, Russia and the US are the only other nations to have sent missions to the moon.
- On July 27, the US Supreme Court cleared the way for the Trump Administration to direct \$2.5 billion in Pentagon funds to construct a border wall with Mexico.

- On July 24, former US special counsel Robert Mueller testified before Congress and reiterated this has report did not exonerate US President Donald Trump of obstructing justice while warning of continuing election interference by Russia.
- On July 17, the US Congress voted against a resolution to impeach US President Donald Trump. an article of impeachment was brought by Congressman Al Green of Texas accusing Trump of bringing “disgrace” on the presidency by issuing racist tweets against four congresswomen. Earlier on July 16, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning US President Donald Trump’s remarks as racist where he told four congresswomen of colour to “go back” to where they “came from”.
- Amid the Trump Administration’s efforts aimed at ensuring 22 separate sales of aircraft support maintenance, precision-guided munitions and other weapons and equipment to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan on July 29, the US Senate failed to override US President Donald Trump’s vetoes of resolutions aimed at blocking arms sales to Saudi Arabia. On July 24, US President Donald Trump vetoed three congressional resolutions aimed at blocking \$8.1 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other allies. On July 17, the US House of Representatives voted to block \$8.1 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other allies.
- Washington Post reported on July 29 that US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo said that President Donald Trump ordered him to reduce the number of American troops in Afghanistan by the 2020 election.
- On July 29, a spokesperson for UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, announced he would not sit down for talks with EU leaders until they agreed to ditch the Irish backstop from the Brexit withdrawal agreement. He has however warned Britain about the possibility of a no deal Brexit. Johnson became the UK’s Prime Minister on July 23 after winning the election to lead the governing Conservatives.
- On July 28, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi said that his country considered Britain’s seizure of an Iranian oil tanker a breach of the ailing 2015 nuclear deal also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- On July 24, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran would release a UK-flagged ship if Britain takes similar steps to release an Iranian oil tanker seized by the British Royal Navy off Gibraltar. Earlier on July 22, UK Prime Minister Theresa May convened a second emergency meeting of ministers and security officials to address Iran’s seizure of a British oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz. Earlier on July 19, British Foreign

Secretary Jeremy Hunt warned Tehran's seizure of a UK-flagged oil tanker showed a "worrying signs Iran may be choosing a dangerous path of illegal and destabilising behaviour."

- On July 16, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen was confirmed as the European commission's first female president replacing Jean-Claude Juncker when he steps down on October 31, 2019.

---Amina Afzal

AMERICAS

Domestic

- On July 29, the House Oversight Committee released a report that concluded that since US President Donald Trump assumed office in 2016, a group of US businessmen sought to profit on deals to build nuclear power plants in Saudi Arabia, while attempting to avoid US restrictions designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons

The report highlighted how the Trump Administration allegedly backed efforts by IP3 International, a private consortium, to win contracts to build nuclear power plants in Saudi Arabia. The report noted that Thomas Barrack, a friend of Trump, was allegedly recruited by IP3 International to use his access to the president to win the Administration's backing for IP3's plans to build nuclear power plants in the Middle East. Representative Elijah Cummings, the Democrat chairman of the Oversight Committee stated, "Today's report reveals new and extensive evidence that corroborates committee whistle-blowers and exposes how corporate and foreign interests are using their unique access to advocate for the transfer of US nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia". He added, "The American people deserve to know the facts about whether the White House is willing to place the potential profits of the president's personal friends above the national security of the American people and the universal objective of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons". The Oversight Committee has been investigating the Trump Administration on multiple fronts after several "whistle-blowers" had come forward to warn about White House attempts to speed the transfer of highly sensitive US nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia.

- On July 28, US President Donald Trump announced on Twitter that the Director of National Intelligence, Dan Coats will step down on August 15, 2019.

Trump announced he will nominate John Ratcliffe, a Republican Congressman from Texas to replace Coats. Trump and Coats have been at odds over US policy towards Russia and North Korea and the threat posed by Iran. Ratcliffe is a staunch Trump ally, and critics have been quick to view Trump's nomination as an attempt to install a Trump loyalist as America's next intelligence chief.

- On July 27, the US Supreme Court cleared the way for the Trump Administration to direct \$2.5 billion in Pentagon funds to construct a border wall with Mexico.

US President Donald Trump had declared an emergency earlier in the year to bypass Congress and secure funding to construct a border wall with Mexico. Around 20 US states along with rights and environmental groups and border communities are backing lawsuits that claim the emergency declaration violates the constitution. A federal judge on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals had issued a temporary injunction against using Defense Department funds for

constructing Trump's proposed border wall. However, the Supreme Court overturned the lower court decision on July 27, 2019. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, along with numerous congressional Democrats, denounced the ruling. Trump hailed the ruling a "big victory" and a "big win for border security and the rule of law".

- On July 26, US President Donald Trump launched a stinging attack on Twitter on Elijah Cummings, the Democratic chair of the House Oversight Committee.

Trump called Cummings a "brutal bully" and said his congressional district was "the worst run and most dangerous (district) anywhere in the United States". Trump called on Cummings to "help clean up this very dangerous and filthy place". Trump's attack on the senior African American Democrat was condemned by Democrats who viewed Trump's outburst as shrouded in racism. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi voiced support for Cummings, stating, "We all reject racist attacks against him and support his steadfast leadership". Earlier in July 2019, Trump came under sharp criticism for his racist attack on four Democratic congresswomen of colour when he said they should "go back" to the countries they came from.

- On July 24, former US special counsel Robert Mueller testified before Congress and reiterated this has report did not exonerate US President Donald Trump of obstructing justice while warning of continuing election interference by Russia.

Mueller conducted a two-year long investigation into allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election. While testifying before Congress, Mueller made clear that Trump was not exonerated of obstructing justice. He added, there was insufficient evidence to establish a criminal conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russians during the 2016 elections, but noted it would not be accurate to suggest there was no evidence of coordination. Mueller while confirming Russian interference in the 2016 elections warned that Russia continues to interfere in US elections stating, "They're doing it as we sit here". Republicans attacked Mueller's credibility and accused his team of political bias, while Mueller's testimony fueled fresh calls to impeach Trump from Democrats. Democratic hopefuls for the upcoming presidential election including Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Kamala Harris, and Joe Biden all called for impeachment proceedings to begin.

- On July 24, Ricardo Rosselló resigned from his position as Governor of Puerto Rico amid protests calling for his resignation.

Protesters demanded Rosselló resign after his messages were leaked, in which he made sexist and homophobic comments and mocked his own constituents. Rosselló stated that he was "not proud" of the "hurtful comments" he made and on July 20, 2019, stepped down as party president and announced he would not seek re-election. Amid continuing protests calling for his

resignation and calls for impeachment, Rosselló finally resigned as governor of the US territory on July 24, 2019.

- On July 23, Mark Esper was sworn in as US Secretary of Defence.

Esper received Senate confirmation on July 18, 2019 in a 90-8 vote. The post of Secretary of Defence has been empty for the last seven months after Jim Mattis stepped down in December 2018, after clashing with US President Donald Trump over the withdrawal of US troops from Syria and Afghanistan.

- On July 22, US President Donald Trump and congressional leaders announced that they had struck a critical debt and budget agreement.

The deal avoids the political chaos of a government shutdown or a showdown over a federal default. The broad outline of the agreement is for \$1.37tn in agency spending in 2020. Trump tweeted that the agreement was “another big victory” for the military, while Democratic leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer said it would “enhance our national security and invest in middle-class priorities”. The deal has however raised serious concern; Maya MacGuineas, the President of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, described the deal as “a total abdication of fiscal responsibility” that “may end up being the worst budget agreement in our nation’s history”.

- On July 17, the US Congress voted against a resolution to impeach US President Donald Trump, after an article of impeachment was brought by the Congressman Al Green of Texas accusing Trump of bringing “disgrace” on the presidency by issuing racist tweets aimed at the four congresswomen.
- On July 16, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning US President Donald Trump’s remarks as racist where he told four congresswomen of colour to “go back” to where they “came from”.

Earlier in July 2019, Trump stirred controversy when he tweeted they should “go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came”, adding “You can’t leave fast enough” in an assumed reference to Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, and Ilhan Omar of Minnesota. In response to Trump’s tweets, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution which was approved along party lines with four Republicans joining Democrats, condemning Trump’s remarks as racist on July 16, 2019. Trump responded to the vote, by praising the unity of the Republican party, and lashed out at the four congresswomen, accusing them of “saying horrible things”. Trump stated on Twitter, “The Democrat Congresswomen have been spewing some of the most vile, hateful, and disgusting things ever said by a politician in the House or

Senate, & yet they get a pass and a big embrace from the Democrat Party”. He added, “Why isn’t the House voting to rebuke the filthy and hate laced things they have said? Because they are the Radical Left, and the Democrats are afraid to take them on”. Republicans largely echoed Trump’s statement, by arguing the issue was not one of race but of ideology. Republicans labelled the Democratic congresswomen as “socialists” and branded them as “anti-American”. Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell defended Trump, stating “The president is not a racist,” adding, “Everyone ought to tone down their rhetoric, and we ought to move back to talking about the issues”. In related news, on July 17, 2019, Democrats joined Republican lawmakers and voted against an article of impeachment brought by the congressman Al Green of Texas. The resolution accused Trump of bringing “disgrace” on the presidency by issuing racist tweets aimed at the four congresswomen. While 95 democrats voted to advance the impeachment resolution; the resolution was eventually voted against. House speaker, Nancy Pelosi on July 17, 2019 stated that multiple investigations into the president, his associates and their activities should conclude before impeachment could be considered. In related news, Trump came under sharp criticism for not condemning the crowds chanting “Send her back!” during a rally on July 17, 2019 in Greenville, North Carolina, when Trump once again attacked the congresswomen. On July 21, US President Donald Trump renewed his attacks on the four Democratic congresswomen where he stated, “I don’t believe the four Congresswomen are capable of loving our Country” adding, “They should apologise to America (and Israel) for the horrible (hateful) things they have said. They are destroying the Democrat Party, but are weak & insecure people who can never destroy our great Nation”.

- On July 16, Amnesty International USA called for a detention center for migrant children in Florida to be closed down, and for congressional public hearings to be held into the “cruel and unlawful” detentions.

Amnesty US’s Executive Director, Margaret Huang, condemned the Homestead Influx Facility which houses several thousand children, ages 13 to 17. It is presently the largest facility in the US for migrant children stating. She stated, “The temporary emergency facility at Homestead is far from meeting basic standards under US and international law for providing and safe and healthy environment for children”. She noted, “A significant number of the children at Homestead have their cases managed by people sitting in Texas. That means they’re not getting the kind of firsthand care you’d expect. There are also a number of children who don’t speak either English or Spanish so often aren’t getting proper attention or the services they need”. The reports state that the private, for-profit facility, holds children in a restrictive setting, where they are required to follow a highly regimented strict schedule and wear ID badges with barcodes that are scanned when they enter and leave buildings. The report made clear that no child should ever be held in conditions of mass detention.

International

- On July 29, the US Senate failed to override US President Donald Trump's vetoes of resolutions aimed at blocking arms sales to Saudi Arabia.
- On July 24, US President Donald Trump vetoed three congressional resolutions aimed at blocking \$8.1 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other allies.
- On July 17, the US House of Representatives voted to block \$8.1 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other allies.

The Trump Administration is seeking 22 separate sales of aircraft support maintenance, precision-guided munitions and other weapons and equipment to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan. Lawmakers however, approved three resolutions aimed at blocking US President Donald Trump's planned arms sale to Saudi Arabia and other allies on July 17, 2019. The Trump Administration's close relationship with Saudi Arabia has come under sharp criticism over the Kingdom's gross human rights abuses and the mounting death toll in its war in Yemen. Trump cited military tensions with Iran in May 2019 to circumvent Congress and use an "emergency" loophole in US arms control law to complete the arms sale. Many politicians have been critical of Trump's claim of an emergency, citing it as exaggerated, and noting that most of the weapons will likely not be delivered for months, even years. The House vote sent three of 22 joint resolutions of disapproval to Trump, who vetoed them on July 24, 2019 stating they would weaken US competitiveness and damage important relationships. The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee pushed back against Trump's veto on July 25, 2019 by backing legislation that would impose sanctions on some Saudi royal family and block some of the proposed weapons sales. However, on July 29, 2019, the three resolutions of disapproval failed to garner the two-third majority in the Senate to override Trump's veto.

- On July 29, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo announced that US President Donald Trump wants to begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan before the 2020 elections.
- On July 26, the US State Department approved \$125 million worth of support for Pakistan's F-16 fleet.

The package, which comes days after Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan met with US President Donald Trump at the White House, includes logistic and technical support for the aircraft flown by the Pakistan Air Force. Washington, in early 2018, had blocked military aid to Pakistan after Trump accused Islamabad of giving "nothing but lies and deceit" in the war against terrorism. In related news, the US simultaneously approved \$670 million worth of support for India's C-17 transport plane fleet. However, the official statement made clear that

the proposed sales of equipment and support to the rival South Asian nations “will not alter the basic military balance in the region.”

- On July 22, US President Donald Trump met with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in Washington.

Both leaders expressed their commitment to expanding bilateral relations and cooperation to achieve peace, stability, and prosperity in South Asia. Trump acknowledged Pakistan’s commitment to improving regional security and counter terrorism. He applauded Pakistan’s efforts to facilitate the peace talks in Afghanistan and called for Islamabad to enhance its role in achieving a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Trump called to expand and strengthen trade relations between the two nations and offered to mediate on the decades-long Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan in a move that signals a shift from long standing US policy that has maintained that issues must resolved bilaterally. Trump noted, “If I can help, I would love to be a mediator,” adding, “If I can do anything to help, let me know”. Trump noted, “We have great potential for relations with Pakistan, I honestly think ties between our two countries have never been better”. US Senator Lindsey Graham also met with Khan on July 22, 2019, where they agreed that sustained and high-level engagement between Pakistan and the US were to the two countries’ mutual advantage. Graham applauded Pakistan’s role in supporting the Afghan peace process and supporting a political settlement in the war-torn country. On July 23, 2019 Khan met with Congressional lawmakers and the Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi. Khan shared his vision of peace and prosperity in South Asia; which he stated can be reached through peaceful resolution of outstanding disputes and cooperation. Khan added bilateral relations between Pakistan and the US moving forward must be based on “mutual trust”. Pelosi and members of Congress applauded Pakistan’s role in supporting the Afghan peace process and maintaining peace in the region. They acknowledged Pakistan’s sacrifices in the war against terror and militancy, and pledged to cooperate with Pakistan in the education and renewable energy sectors.

- On July 22, the Trump Administration announced that it will expand the authority of immigration officers to deport migrants without allowing them to first appear before immigration judges.

In what is termed “expedited removal”, anyone who has been in the US unlawfully for less than two years can be immediately deported. Kevin McAleenan, the acting Homeland Security Secretary, maintained the ‘expedited removal’ authority is another Trump Administration effort to address an “ongoing crisis on the southern border” by freeing up space in detention facilities and reducing a backlog of more than 900,000 cases in immigration courts.

- On July 22, the US State Department urged Cambodia to reject any Chinese military presence on its soil, saying the nation had a “constitutional commitment to its people to pursue an independent foreign policy”.

After reports emerged that China has signed a secret deal to allow its military troops to be stationed at the Ream naval base on the Gulf of Thailand, the State Department noted, “We are concerned that any steps by the Cambodian government to invite a foreign military presence in Cambodia would threaten the coherence and centrality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in coordinating regional developments, and disturb peace and stability in south-east Asia”. Cambodia however has repeatedly denied the agreement with China.

- On July 21, the US military accused a Venezuelan fighter aircraft of “aggressively” shadowing a US Navy EP-3 Aries II plane over international airspace.

In a statement by the US military, a “Russian-made fighter aggressively shadowed the EP-3 at an unsafe distance in international airspace for a prolonged period of time, endangering the safety of the crew and jeopardizing the EP-3 mission” on July 19, 2019. The Venezuelan government announced they rejected “the incursion of a US reconnaissance and intelligence aircraft” in the flight area surrounding Maiquetia airport, which serves the capital, Caracas. They stated, a US aircraft was detected in Venezuelan airspace and did not report its presence to local authorities, thereby posing a risk to other planes in the area. As a result, two Venezuelan fighter jets intercepted the aircraft and escorted it out of Venezuela’s airspace. The US military stated, “The Maduro regime continues to undermine internationally recognized laws and demonstrate its contempt for international agreements authorizing the US and other nations to safely conduct flights in international airspace”. The Trump Administration has repeatedly used sanctions in an effort to oust Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro from power after his 2018 re-election was deemed illegitimate by the US and a number of Western nations.

- On July 19, the Pentagon announced US military personnel and resources will be deployed to Saudi Arabia to provide “an additional deterrent” in the face of “emergent, credible threats” in the region. The US deployments aim to boost regional security as tensions in the Gulf mount over Iran’s standoff with the US.
- On July 19, US President Donald Trump announced the USS Boxer took “defensive action” against an unmanned Iranian drone in the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump stated the USS Boxer shot down an Iranian drone after it came within 1,000 yards of the warship and ignored multiple calls to stand down. Trump stated, “This is the latest of many provocative and hostile actions by Iran against vessels operating in international waters. The United States reserves the right to defend our personnel, facilities and interests, and calls upon

all nations to condemn Iran's attempts to disrupt freedom of navigation and global commerce". Iran however has denied the claim that its drone had been shot down. Tensions between Tehran and Washington are high; spurred on by Trump's decision in May 2018 to pull out of a 2015 multilateral nuclear deal with Iran and impose an oil and banking embargo on Iran. There has been a sharp increase in incidents in the Gulf, exacerbating concerns that the US and Iran may find themselves stumbling into war.

- On July 18, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo accused China of the "stain of the century" in its treatment of Uighur Muslims.

Pompeo, speaking at an international religious freedom conference in Washington noted the mass detentions of Uighur Muslims in China was among the "worst human rights crises of our time". Pompeo denounced China for its large-scale detentions in the western Xinjiang region, where an estimated 1 million Muslim Uighurs, Kazakhs and other minorities are believed to be held in internment camps. Critics have pointed out the Trump Administration's sharp reduction in admissions of refugees and asylum seekers has put many, including religious minorities, at risk. In a report released on the eve of the conference, the International Rescue Committee said that so far this year the administration has slashed admissions of Iranian Christians by 97%, Iraqi Christians by 96%, Iraqi and Syrian Yazidis by 97% and Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar by 77%, compared with the last government spending year of the Obama administration.

- On July 17, the US announced it was removing Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet programme after Ankara began accepting delivery of the advanced Russian S-400 air defence system.

Turkey received the first parts of the S-400 air defence system on July 12, 2019 despite Washington's resistance to Turkey acquiring the Russian made missile defence system. Washington is concerned that deploying the S-400 with the F-35 fighter jets would allow Russia to gain too much inside information about the aircraft's stealth system. The White House issued a statement arguing, "The F-35 cannot coexist with a Russian intelligence-collection platform that will be used to learn about its advanced capabilities". Ellen Lord, the Undersecretary of Defence for Acquisition noted, "The US and other F-35 partners are aligned in this decision to suspend Turkey from the programme and initiate the process to formally remove Turkey from the programme". Turkey currently makes more than 900 parts of the F-35. Lord noted the supply chain would transition from Turkish to mainly US factories, as Turkish suppliers are removed. She noted, "Turkey will certainly and regrettably lose jobs and future economic opportunities from this decision," adding, "It will no longer receive more than \$9 billion in projected work share related to the F-35 over the life of the programme".

Latin America

- On July 25, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro announced his mobile phones had been accessed by hackers.

Bolsonaro claimed that four people who were arrested in Brazil on July 23, 2019 for allegedly hacking the phones of Justice Minister Sergio Moro, a key member of Bolsonaro's cabinet, and the phones of two federal judges and two federal police investigators were responsible for hacking his phones as well. He announced on Twitter, "I was informed by the Federal Police and the Justice Ministry that my cell phones were invaded by the gang arrested on Tuesday, 23. A serious attempt against Brazil and its institutions. May they be harshly punished! Brazil is no longer land without law". A political storm was unleashed after leaked conversations between Moro and other officials revealed that while still a judge, Moro had advised prosecutors in the corruption prosecution of the former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

---Kiran Mazari

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

- On July 30, India signed a deal with Russia for buying R-27 air-to-air missiles worth \$218 million.

An official from the Indian Defence Ministry noted, “A contract has been signed with Russia for the acquisition of R-27 air-to-air missile to be fitted on the Su-30MKI combat aircraft fleet of the Indian Air Force.” With a strike-range of 60 kilometres, the R-27 missile is capable of eliminating air targets in adverse weather conditions at any time of day. Russia has developed these missiles for its MiG and Sukhoi series of fighter jets. The country has provided India with more than 270 assembled Su-30 MKI fighter jets. In its arms procurement deals signed with numerous different countries, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is procuring a large number of different missiles including the Spice-2000, Strum Ataka ATGMs and a large number of spares under the emergency procurement route. The Indian Central Government has given emergency powers to the three services to buy weapons deemed necessary to improve security measures, after the Pulwama incident in February 2019.

- On July 31, North Korea launched two more short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast; the country’s second missile test in less than six days.
- On July 25, North Korea test-fired two short-range missiles, marking the first missile launches after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump agreed in June 2019 to revive the stalled denuclearisation talks.

The South Korean military noted that missiles launched on July 31, 2019, travelled about 250 kilometres and reached a height of 30 kilometres before landing in the sea. South Korea’s Joint Chief of Staff (JCS) said in a statement, “The North’s repeated missile launches are not helpful to an effort to ease tensions on the Korean peninsula and we urge North Korea to stop this kind of behaviour.” US military officials also confirmed the launches. Earlier, on July 25, 2019, North Korea had also test-fired two short-range missiles. According to state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), Kim “personally organised and guided” the firing of the “state-of-the-art weaponry system.” The report noted that Kim has directed the North Korean Military to “develop nonstop super powerful weapon systems to remove the potential and direct threats.” An official at South Korea’s Defence Ministry indicated that the missiles were launched from the east coast city of Wonsan with one flying about 430 kilometres and the other 690 kilometres over the sea. Defence analysts have suggested that latest missiles could be Scud-C ballistic missiles or KN-23 surface-to-surface missiles, a North Korean version of the Iskander ballistic missile.

On July 26, 2019, KCNA announced that North Korea’s test of a “new-type tactical guided weapon,” was meant to be a “solemn warning about South Korean weapons development and its

rival's plans to hold military exercises." KCNA said, "The South Korean chief executive should not make a mistake of ignoring the warning from Pyongyang."

- On July 26, Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Turkey has planned to operationalise Russian developed S-400 air defence systems by 2020.

Erdogan said, "In the coming spring, God willing in April 2020, we will be able to start using this system." On July 12, 2019, Turkey confirmed it had received the first shipment of Russian-made S-400 air defence systems, in defiance of US warnings against its procurement. In response, both the US and NATO expressed concerns over the delivery of the system. In retaliation on July 17, 2019, the US announced that Turkey would no longer participate in its F-35 fighter jet programme. White House spokeswoman, Stephanie Grisham said, "Unfortunately, Turkey's decision to purchase Russian S-400 air defence systems render its continued involvement with the F-35 impossible." Grisham indicated that both F-35 jets and S-400 systems could not co-exist as the US could not allow the Russian intelligence collection platform to be used to learn about its advanced capabilities. Ellen Lord, the US Undersecretary of Defence for Acquisition and Sustainment, said that Turkey's removal from F-35 programme would take place in 2020. In response, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned the US' decision. On July 26, 2019, Erdogan said, "No threats or sanctions against Turkey, especially threats to remove Turkey from the F-35 project, will prevent Turkey from ensuring its security priorities." He added, "You will not give the F-35? Very well, excuse me, but we will take measures in this regard and will turn toward others."

In a related development on July 18, 2019, Russia announced its willingness to offer its SU-35 fighter jets to Turkey. Sergei Chemezov, Head of Russia's state-controlled Rostech corporation, said in a statement, "Moscow would be willing to sell its SU-35 fighter jets to Turkey if Ankara "expresses interest."

- On July 26, US President Donald Trump vetoed three congressional resolutions barring billions of dollars in weapons sales to countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the UAE.

In his letters to Senate, Trump said, the resolutions "would weaken US' global competitiveness and damage the important relationships we share with our allies and partners." Trump said that blocking the US weapon sales to its allies in the Middle East "would likely prolong the conflict in Yemen and deepen the suffering it causes", and that "without precision-guided munitions, more civilians are likely to become casualties". On June 20, 2019, the US Senate voted to block the White House's plans for \$8.1 billion in military sales to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan. The US Senate voted on three resolutions aimed at preventing the military sales approved by President Trump in May 2019. The disapproval of resolutions would have blocked 22 separate sales of aircraft support maintenance, precision-guided munitions and other weapons to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan.

- On July 28, Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel's US-backed Arrow-3 ballistic missile defence system has passed a series of live interception tests over Alaska.

While announcing the three secret tests, Benjamin Netanyahu said, "The performance was perfect - every hit a bull's eye." Netanyahu added, "Today Israel has the capabilities to act against ballistic missiles launched at us from Iran and from anywhere else. All our foes should know that we can beat them, both defensively and offensively." According to reports, the Arrow-3 missiles successfully targeted missiles in high-altitude and used hit-to-kill test engagements. The tests were a joint effort between the Israel Missile Defence Organisation of the Directorate of Defence Research and Development and the US Missile Defence Agency (MDA), conducted at the Pacific Spaceport Complex-Alaska in Kodiak. MDA Director Vice Adm. Jon Hill said, "These successful tests mark a major milestone in the development of the Arrow Weapon System. This unique success in Alaska provides confidence in future Israeli capabilities to defeat the developing threats in the region." Jointly developed by Israel Aerospace Industries and Boeing Co, the interceptor system became operational in 2017, after passing its first full interception test over the Mediterranean Sea in 2015. Capable of intercepting missiles outside of atmosphere, the Arrow weapon system is part of Israel's layered defence system including Iron Dome, David's Sling and Arrow-2 systems.

- According to CNN on July 26, Iran test-fired a medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) from Iran's south-eastern coastline along the Gulf of Oman on July 24, 2019.

The report noted that Iran had launched a Shahab-3 MRBM which travelled 1,000 kilometres from its southern launch point and landed in the northern side of the country. A US military official noted that the missile remained inside the country for the duration of its flight and did not pose any threat to US bases. On July 27, 2019, FARS news agency reported that "an informed source in Iran's General Staff of the Armed Forces described missile power as a vital need to defend the country, saying that missile tests to this end are completely natural." While confirming the missile test, the military source said, "Iran's missile tests in area of the country's defence need is a natural issue." He added, "Iran does not need permission from any power in the world to defend itself and considers defence as the inherent responsibility of the Islamic Republic's government and Armed Forces." The official also noted that the missile test was a part of the country's efforts to improve its accuracy.

- On July 22, Pakistan and the UK agreed to continue engagement on Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament issues during the fourth round of Pakistan-UK Bilateral Consultations on Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament held in Islamabad.

Mohammad Kamran Akhtar, Director General (Arms Control & Disarmament) and Samantha Job, Director for Defence and International Security, led the delegations of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs of Pakistan and the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, respectively. During the meeting, the two sides discussed issues on international arms control and the non-proliferation agenda. The delegations also discussed issues relating to global and regional security and stability, as well as areas of cooperation and collaboration in multilateral fora. According to the Foreign Office, the next round of meeting would be held in London in 2020.

- On July 19, India's Ministry of Defence announced that the Indian Defence and Research Development Organisation (DRDO) had completed summer user trials with the 'third-generation' fire-and-forget weapon, known as Nag anti-tank guided missile (ATGM).

DRDO conducted missile tests at the Pokhran Field Firing Ranges in the western Indian state of Rajasthan. The Defence Ministry noted, "The missile had successfully undergone a series of summer trials at Pokhran Field Firing Ranges carried out by the Indian Army during 7-18 July 2019." The Ministry added, "All of the tested missiles met the mission objectives, including minimum range, maximum range, in direct attack as well as top attack modes, and achieved a direct hit onto the target." According to media reports, the missile was tested for 12 times over an 11-day period. Following successful series of tests, the Ministry of Defence said, "Completion of summer user trials will now pave the way for production and induction of the missile system into the army." The Indian government has already granted "acceptance of necessity" in April 2018 to procure the missile.

--- Moiz Khan

CHINA, EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

China

- On July 24, China's Ministry of National Defence released a white paper on China's national defence strategy.

According to the white paper titled, "China's National Defense in the New Era", China's defence expenditure increased from US\$98 billion to \$152 billion between 2012 and 2017. The white paper said that international security systems were threatened due to the growing hegemonies, unilateralism, and persistent regional conflicts. Criticising the US for undermining global strategic stability and deploying the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea, the report said the US severely undermined the security interests of countries in the region. The white paper stated, "the US is strengthening its Asia-Pacific military alliances and reinforcing military deployment and intervention, adding complexity to regional security."

- On July 24, the Chinese Military denied reports of signing a secret deal to build a military outpost in coastal Cambodia.

China's Defence Ministry spokesman, Senior Colonel Wu Qian, dismissed reports that China was seeking to build a military base in Cambodia calling them "not true." He stated that "the Chinese and Cambodian armed forces have always carried out good exchanges and cooperation in military and personnel training, and logistics equipment." News of the secret deal emerged when a report published in the Wall Street Journal on July 21, 2019, claimed that Cambodia had signed a secret agreement that "gives China exclusive rights to part of the Ream Naval Base."

In a related development, on July 26, 2019, a group of 80 journalists visited Cambodia's Ream Naval Base after rumors of a secret deal allowing China to build a military outpost in Cambodia. Rear Admiral Ouk Seyha, Commander of the Ream Naval Base, said, "Neither the Ream Naval Base, nor other bases in Cambodia is allowed to host a foreign military base because it is against the country's constitution."

- On July 21, amid an escalation in the demonstrations against an extradition bill, protesters targeted China's liaison office in Hong Kong.

In a response to the targeting of a mainland Chinese liaison office, the Chinese Military on July 24, 2019, said that it can be deployed to Hong Kong to preserve social order at the request of the city's government. China's Defence Ministry spokesman, Wu Qian, said that the vandalism of the central government liaison office in Hong Kong challenged the principle of "one country, two systems". When asked how the Defence Ministry would handle events in Hong Kong, Wu said, "Article 14 of the Garrison Law has clear stipulations." Article 14 states that military forces stationed by the central government in Hong Kong are for the purpose of defence but at the request of the special administration, they may assist in the preservation of public order.

South Korea

- On July 23, warplanes from South Korea, Russia, Japan, and China faced off in a confrontation above a disputed island off the coast of South Korea and Japan.

A statement issued by South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff claimed they had fired more than 300 warning shots at a Russian A-50 command and control military aircraft after it had twice violated the country's airspace. Japan's Ministry of Defence supported South Korea's claims of the A-50 flying over the islands and said that Tokyo had scrambled fighters to intercept. Furthermore, both South Korea and Japan confirmed that two Chinese H-6 bombers had joined the Russian military aircraft on a raid through the region as well. The Russian Defence Ministry confirmed in a statement that two Russian Tu-95 bombers and two Chinese H-6 bombers had conducted an air patrol over the waters of the Japan and East China Seas. The statement further added that the patrol was "carried out in order to deepen and develop Russian-Chinese relations" and was "not aimed against third countries."

Japan

- On July 21, Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, declared victory in Japan's national elections and became the country's longest-serving prime minister.

According to the public broadcaster NHK, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won 71 of the 124 seats in the 245-member House of Councillors. Abe in a press conference, on July 22, 2019, said "this is a choice about the political stability and chaos. We asked the voters to choose between these two options and many people listened to our speeches on the streets."

- On July 18, at least 35 people died and 36 were injured after a man set fire to an animation studio in the Japanese city of Kyoto.

Japan's Police said that the suspect broke into the Kyoto Animation studio and sprayed petrol before igniting it. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe offered his condolences and said the incident was "too appalling for words." The suspect, Shinji Aoba, who remains in a serious condition, is yet to be questioned by the investigators.

Indonesia

- On July 24, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, arrived in Jakarta, Indonesia, on a state visit.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan proclaimed their commitment to expanding collaboration between Indonesia and the UAE, taking advantage of the extensive opportunities for economic and development cooperation, as well as strengthening mutual understanding and bilateral ties. According to the Indonesian government, companies in Indonesia and the UAE signed agreements worth \$9.7 billion during the visit of Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince.

Malaysia

- On July 30, the Sultan of Pahang, Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, was installed as the 16th King of Malaysia.

The ruler of the state of Pahang was crowned as King for the next five years in a ceremony at the national palace in Kuala Lumpur. Approximately 700 guests attended the ceremony, including the Malay rulers, Cabinet ministers and foreign dignitaries. The installation came six months after the unanticipated abdication of Sultan Muhammad V of Kelantan.

Cambodia

- On July 29, Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen announced the decision to spend an additional \$40 million on weapons from China to modernise Cambodia's military.

Cambodian Prime Minister said the \$40 million to be spent by Cambodia was in addition to a total of \$290 million spent on previous arms deals with China. He said weapons being purchased included guns that were to replace old stock.

---Fareeha Shamim

EUROPE

- On July 31 Mary Lou McDonald, leader of Sinn Féin, announced that a no-deal Brexit must be followed by a poll on potential Irish reunification.

McDonald argued the prospect of a no-deal Brexit had “focused minds” in Northern Ireland and that a border poll would be justifiable. She noted, “I don’t know how the government could crash this part of Ireland out of the EU with all of the harm and damage, economically and politically, and with a straight face, suggest to any of us who live on this island, that we should not be given the democratic opportunity, as per the Good Friday agreement, to decide our future. I think that would be quite scandalous”.

- On July 29, a spokesperson for UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, announced he would not sit down for talks with EU leaders until they agreed to ditch the Irish backstop from the Brexit withdrawal agreement.
- On July 25, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson addressed the House of Commons and reiterated his pledge of scrapping the Irish backstop, while warning of a no-deal Brexit scenario if a new deal with the EU could not be reached.
- On July 23, Boris Johnson was selected to become the UK’s next Prime Minister after winning the election to lead the governing Conservatives.

Johnson defeated British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt in the election and was officially appointed as Britain’s Prime Minister on July 24, 2019. In his first official address Johnson promised to ensure Britain leaves the EU by October 31, 2019 claiming he can do a better deal with the EU but will prepare for a no deal scenario. On July 25, 2019, Johnson addressed the House of Commons for the first time as Prime Minister and reiterated his campaign pledge of ditching the Irish backstop and promised to ramp up preparations for a no-deal Brexit immediately. He noted, “I would prefer us to leave the EU with a deal,” adding, “I would much prefer it. I believe that it is possible even at this late stage, and I will work flat-out to make it happen”. In related news, on July 25, 2019, the European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, spoke with Johnson and signaled that the EU will stick with the deal negotiated with Theresa May’s government – which includes the backstop. A commission spokesperson stated, “President Juncker listened to what Prime Minister Johnson had to say, reiterating the EU’s position that the withdrawal agreement is the best and only agreement possible – in line with the European council guidelines”. Ireland also expressed its concern over the new position of the British government, which involves demands for a new deal without the Irish border backstop by October 31, 2019.

On July 29, 2019 Johnson’s spokesperson announced the Prime Minister will not sit down for talks with EU leaders unless they agreed to scrapping the Irish backstop despite invitations to

meeting from the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the French president, Emmanuel Macron. The statement added, Johnson wanted to strike a deal, but that there was no point in holding face-to-face talks unless the EU agreed to reopen the agreement.

- On July 28, more than 1,000 protestors were arrested at a banned opposition rally calling for city authorities to reverse decisions to exclude key opposition candidates from the ballot paper in Moscow.

The protest marked a growing wave of demonstrations calling for fair local elections in Moscow. Leading opposition figures and would-be candidates were arrested prior to the protest, and police have raided the homes and headquarters of several disqualified candidates.

- On July 25, Spain's caretaker Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez failed to secure the parliamentary votes required to form a government after a coalition deal was rejected.

Sánchez's PSOE party gained the most seats in April's election, but fell short of a majority. Sánchez needed the backing of the left-wing Podemos party, but its ministers abstained in the vote held on July 25, 2019, describing the deal as "unacceptable". If Sánchez is unable to find a solution in the next two months, a general election will have to be called, making it the fourth election held in Spain in four years.

- On July 25, Ukraine seized a Russian tanker in the port city of Izmail on the Danube River.

Analysts are viewing Ukraine's move as retaliation in response to Russia's seizure of three Ukrainian vessels and the arrest of 24 sailors in November 2018. Ukraine has been engaged with Russia in an attempt to free the 24 arrested sailors. The head of the Russian Parliament's International Affairs Committee, Leonid Slutsky, stated Ukraine's move against the Russian tanker amounted to "state-sponsored piracy" and said it was "unlawful and illicit pressure on the investigation" into the Ukrainian sailors seized by Russia.

- On July 22, British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt told parliament that he was seeking to develop a maritime protection mission with Germany, France and other European nation, but not the US due to differences in agendas.
- On July 22, UK Prime Minister Theresa May convened a second emergency meeting of ministers and security officials to address Iran's seizure of a British oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz.
- On July 19, British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt warned Tehran's seizure of a UK-flagged oil tanker showed a "worrying signs Iran may be choosing a dangerous path of illegal and destabilising behavior".

Tensions rose between London and Tehran after Iran's Revolutionary Guard seized a British-flagged tanker in the strait of Hormuz. The ship's owners stated, the vessel had been

“approached by unidentified small crafts and a helicopter during transit of the strait of Hormuz while the vessel was in international waters”. British authorities accused the Iranian Navy of violating “international maritime rules,” by “illegally” interfering with the vessel’s passage. In a letter to the UN Security Council, the UK mission to the UN claimed that the tanker was sailing in Omani territorial waters at the time of its seizure by Iranian forces. Tehran however contends the ship was seized for failure to abide by international maritime rules after an “accident” with an Iranian fishing boat. Hunt announced on July 20, 2019 that he spoken to his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif to express his “extreme disappointment” over Iran’s actions and vowed to protect British ships as tensions with Tehran rise. The EU condemned Iran’s actions, and on July 21, 2019, Hunt spoke to his French and German counterparts where the leaders agreed that “safe passage for vessels through the Strait of Hormuz is a top priority for European nations, while avoiding any possible escalation in the region”. In related news, on July 21, 2019, British Prime Minister Theresa May convened an emergency meeting of ministers and security officials to discuss how to respond to Iran after it seized the British vessel, and a second meeting on July 22, 2019. Hunt, while addressing parliament on July 22, 2019, pointed out that he was looking to develop a maritime protection mission with Germany, France and other European nations- but not the US due to differences in their agenda as Europeans nations were not part of the US “maximum pressure” campaign on Iran.

In related news, on July 29, 2019 The Ministry of Defence announced a British warship, the HMS Duncan, had arrived in the Gulf after having been dispatched to escort UK-flagged ships amid heightened tensions with Iran. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace noted, “While we continue to push for a diplomatic resolution that will make this possible again without military accompaniment, the Royal Navy will continue to provide a safeguard for UK vessels until this is the reality.”

- On July 19, Kosovo’s Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj resigned after being invited for questioning by a Hague-based court investigating crimes against ethnic Serbs during and after the 1998-99 war.

Haradinaj resigned from his position as Prime Minister stating, “I considered that I cannot go to the questioning as head of the government”. He urged Kosovo’s president to call an early parliamentary election. Haradinaj was one of the top Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) commanders during the war with Serbia. Serbia has alleged that he oversaw a campaign of torture and murder against ethnic Serbs during the conflict. The special EU-backed court was set up in 2015 to try war crimes allegedly committed by the KLA against ethnic minorities and political opponents. Incidentally, Haradinaj, who denies war crimes charges, has been tried and acquitted twice at the UN tribunal.

- On July 18, a Russian nuclear power plant unplugged three of its four units after a short circuit. The Kalinin nuclear power plant's first, second and fourth reactors were taken offline and authorities confirmed that radiation levels remain normal.
- On July 17, the European commission announced all EU countries will be subject to annual monitoring on the rule of law in an effort to stop democratic backsliding.

Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission and European Commissioner for Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights announced the commission would publish an annual rule-of-law report, which would cover all member states to help detect “emerging rule-of-law problems wherever they appear”. Timmermans said the rule of law had “come under attack in several ways” in the past five years, without naming specific countries. He added, “The European commission has been fighting hard to resist these attacks with the tools available to us, and will continue to do so. Today we have decided to further strengthen our toolbox, to promote, protect and enforce the rule of law.”

- On July 16, Ursula von der Leyen was confirmed as the European commission's first female president.

In a secret ballot, MEPs voted narrowly to support the German Defence Minister as a replacement for Jean-Claude Juncker when he steps down on October 31, 2019. Von der Leyen won the support of 383 MEPs, nine votes more than required to secure an absolute majority, but below the 400 threshold that would have given her a stable majority to get her policies through parliament over the next five years.

---Kiran Mazari

GLOBAL TERRORISM

- On July 30, Governor Punjab, Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar, said that Islam had nothing to do with terrorism, and Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts remain unparalleled.

While addressing a ceremony on the launch of the book "Paigham-ePakistan," (Message from Pakistan), organised by the Institute of Islamic Research, International Islamic University (IIU), Muhammad Sarwar noted that "Paigham-e-Pakistan" was a historic document which presented a true narrative of Islam on terrorism, intolerance and extremism. Sarwar said, "Paigham-e-Pakistan is the work of more than 5000 religious scholars of the country and categorically rejects the narrow-mindedness of the terrorists and their sympathisers and it explains with Quranic citations how Islam rejects terrorism, extremism, and religious intolerance and preaches compassion towards minorities." Initially published in 2018, "Paigham-ePakistan," is a unanimously agreed document and is prepared with the assistance and support of state institutions of Pakistan. The document which is prepared in accordance with the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet and the Constitution of Pakistan, reflects the collective thinking of the State of Pakistan. The document serves to be a narrative and decree against terrorism and extremism.

- According to Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) on July 30, China reaffirmed its commitment to strengthen anti-terrorism, law enforcement and security cooperation with Pakistan.

The report noted that Guo Shengkun, a Member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Head of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, held a meeting with General Zubair Mahmood Hayat, Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), on July 30, 2019. During the meeting, Shengkun reaffirmed that China was ready to strengthen anti-terrorism, law enforcement and security cooperation with Pakistan in order to provide a security guarantee to the construction of the Belt and Road as well as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He also called for implementation of the consensus reached between China and Pakistan to further enhance strategic cooperation. General Hayat also ensured that Pakistan would continue to make efforts to strengthen the security of Chinese personnel, organisations and projects in Pakistan

- According to Dawn on July 26, Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) asked the governments of Punjab and Sindh to take effective measures regarding the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) threats against property tycoon Malik Riaz demanding \$10 million in extortion money.

The report noted that the TTP's finance wing had sent an email to Malik Riaz containing the demand for the extortion money. The militant group has provided a bank account number in the

email, and threatened Riaz and his family would face harmful consequences in case of non-payment. NACTA has urged the director general of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), provincial police chiefs of Sindh and Punjab and the commissioner in Islamabad to take effective measures to thwart the threat.

- On July 24, India's Lok Sabha, lower house of the Parliament, passed the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill 2019, which would provide the Central Government with powers to declare any person as terrorist, if the bill becomes law.

The bill has to be passed by the upper house before it becomes law. Opponents to the bill including the main opposition Congress party led a parliamentary walkout as the bill was debated. They warned the legislation was too broad and open to abuse. Under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, a person can be designated as a terrorist on broad grounds, without following due process. The name of such a person will be included in the Fourth Schedule proposed to be added in the parent Act. Amnesty International India said it could become a tool of repression, and criminalise dissent. However, Indian Home Minister Amit Shah defended amendments to the anti-terror law. Shah termed the amendment bill essential for law enforcement agencies in their fight against terrorism. He said, "The only purpose of this law is to root out terrorism. We will ensure that this law will not be misused."

- On July 24, Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigations Department noted that the April 21, 2019, Easter attacks were carried out by local terrorist groups who drew inspiration from Daesh but were not linked to the militant group.

Ravi Seneviratne, Head of the Criminal Investigations Department, said the suicide bombers had no direct link to the foreign terrorist group. Seneviratne made these comments during a meeting with the country's parliamentary panel investigating the security and intelligence lapses that led to the bombings. On April 21, 2019, some eight coordinated terrorist attacks were carried out in Colombo, Sri Lanka; killing at least 253 people and wounding 500 others. The terrorist attacks targeted three churches and four hotels in the city. Daesh claimed responsibility for the terrorist attacks. In its statement, Daesh said, "The attackers targeted Christians and the nationals of a (79-state) coalition to fight the Islamic State." However, the Sri Lankan government had also accused two local terrorist groups including National Thowheed Jamaat (NTJ) and Jammiyathul Millathu Ibrahim of conducting the attacks. Regarding Daesh's claim of responsibility for the attack, he noted that remnants of the NTJ had persuaded Daesh to claim the attack two days after the deadly events in Sri Lanka. Shani Abeysekera, CID Investigator, told the parliamentary panel that the CID found 105 kilogrammes of explosives from an NTJ hideout in 2019.

--- Moiz Khan

MIDDLE EAST & WEST ASIA

Iran

- On July 28, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi said that his country considered Britain's seizure of an Iranian oil tanker a breach of the ailing 2015 nuclear deal also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- On July 24, President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran might release a UK-flagged ship if Britain takes similar steps to release an Iranian oil tanker seized by the British Royal Navy off Gibraltar.

In comments published on his website, Rouhani said, "We do not seek the continuation of tension with some European countries. Should they be committed to international frameworks and give up their wrong actions, including what they did in Gibraltar, they will receive a proportional response from Iran." Britain has announced plans to develop and deploy a Europe-led 'maritime protection mission' to safeguard shipping in the area after Iran's Revolutionary Guard seized the Stena Impero in the Strait of Hormuz on July 19, 2019. President Rouhani said that while Iran does not seek a military conflict, it will not allow threats to its security in the important waterway. He described the Iranian seizure of the ship as "professional and brave". Iranian officials alleged the ship was seized after it violated international maritime law by turning off its signalling for longer than is allowed and passing through the wrong channels. However, Iranian officials have also suggested the ship was seized in response to Britain's role in impounding an Iranian supertanker two weeks earlier off the coast of Gibraltar, which is a British overseas territory. The UK says the tanker was suspected of violating sanctions on oil shipments to Syria. Both sides have called the interception of one another's ships "hostile acts" and "piracy".

- According to the head of counter-intelligence at the Iranian Intelligence Ministry, Iran arrested 17 suspects and sentenced some to death after dismantling a CIA spy ring.

According to the unnamed official, Security agencies "successfully dismantled a (CIA) spy network. Those who deliberately betrayed the country were handed to the judiciary... some were sentenced to death and some to long-term imprisonment." The suspects were arrested between March 2018 and March 2019. The counter-intelligence chief said 17 people suspected of espionage had been identified; all of them Iranians. The suspects had been "employed at sensitive and crucial centres and also the private sector related to them, working as contractors or consultants". US President, Donald Trump dismissed the report as "totally false".

Iraq

- On July 17, the Turkish vice consul to Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, along with two other people, were shot dead in the regional capital Arbil.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but it is important to consider that Turkey is already waging a fierce offensive against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) bases in northern Iraq. A spokesman for the Iraqi Foreign Ministry confirmed the incident and condemned the attack. Turkey's Foreign Ministry said an employee at its Arbil consulate was killed in a shooting outside the consulate. Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, "We are continuing our efforts with the Iraqi government and local authorities to find the perpetrators of this attack as quickly as possible." President Erdogan's spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin vowed that "the necessary response will be given to those who committed this treacherous attack."

Israel

- On July 22, Israel demolished a number of Palestinian homes it considers illegally constructed near its separation barrier, south of Jerusalem.

The move by Israel drew international condemnation. Palestinian leaders criticised the demolitions in the Sur Baher area, which lies between the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, but Israel defended them as essential to its security and noted they had been approved by its supreme court. UN officials and the European Union condemned the demolitions and called for an immediate halt to the policy. Palestinians accuse Israel of using security as a pretext to force them out of the area as part of long-term efforts to expand settlements and roads linking them. In a statement, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called on the "international community to intervene immediately to stop this aggression against our people".

Palestine

- On July 30, Palestinian Prime Minister, Mohammad Shtayyeh warned the Israeli regime that it would suffer a "democratic death" if it refuses to support a two-state solution to the conflict between the two sides.

During his address to the Socialist International organisation in Ramallah, Shtayyeh said, "Israel stands today before a big challenge - either the two-state solution or a demographic death." He also noted that the Palestinians currently make up the majority population between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, estimating that there are 6.8 million Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the occupied lands compared to 6.6 million Israelis. Shtayyeh called the Administration of US President Trump ignorant for thinking that it could make the Palestinian people surrender by recognising Jerusalem as Israel's "capital" when

transferring its embassy from Tel Aviv to the occupied city and cutting financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority. He said Palestinians would not accept less than the minimum of freedom, independence and the establishment of their sovereign state along the 1967 lines with Jerusalem as its capital.

- On July 25, Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas declared an end to “all agreements, including security coordination” with Tel Aviv amid Israeli violations against the Palestinians.

President Abbas made the announcement following an emergency meeting held at the presidential headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah. He said in a tweet, “After all the violations committed against our people, we announce the cessation of all agreements signed with Israel.” He stressed that the suspension would also include “security coordination” between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Tel Aviv regime. During the meeting, the Palestinian President said that the PA leadership had decided to lay out “mechanisms” to establish a committee implementing the decision amid continued “Israeli violations”. Abbas also criticised the US-designated “deal of the century” as a further flagrant violation of Palestinian rights.

Saudi Arabia

- On July 23, Saudi Arabia’s cabinet said that Iran’s interception of commercial vessels in Gulf waters, including its seizure of a British tanker, violated international law and must be prevented.

The statement from the cabinet said, “Any disruption of the freedom of international maritime traffic is considered a violation of international law and the international community must do what is necessary to reject it and deter it.” The Saudi remarks came after Britain called for a European-led naval mission to ensure safe shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, the world’s most important oil artery. In a related development, Iraq, which counts both Iran and the US as its main allies, said Tehran had reassured it that there would be freedom of international maritime navigation in the Gulf.

- According to the Saudi Foreign Ministry on July 19, the US is sending American forces, including fighter aircraft, air defence missiles and likely more than 500 troops, to a Saudi air base.

Senior American defence officials said some US troops and Patriot air defence missile systems have already arrived at Prince Sultan Air Base, south of Riyadh, where the troops have been preparing for the arrival of aircraft as well as additional troops. The agreement between Saudi Arabia and the US has been in the works for many weeks and is not a response specifically to seizure by Iran of a British tanker in the Persian Gulf. Tensions with Iran have spiked since May

2019 when the Trump Administration said it had detected increased Iranian preparations for possible attacks on US forces and interests in the Gulf area.

Syria

- On July 27, at least 11 people, mostly children, were killed in regime air strikes on an open-air market in the town of Ariha.
- On July 22, at least 43 people were killed in regime and Russian air strikes in northwest Syria.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, air strikes on the vegetable market and surrounding areas in Maaret al Numan killed 35 civilians and two unidentified persons. The Observatory said a Russian aircraft carried out the air raids, but Moscow denied it was responsible. The region is supposed to be protected by a months-old international truce deal; however, it has come under increased bombardment by the Syrian regime and its ally Russia, since late April 2019. The increase in violence has killed more than 680 civilians and damaged or destroyed two dozen health facilities.

- On July 26, the Syrian regime categorically rejected any deal between Turkey and the US on a buffer zone in northern Syria, describing it as a violation of its sovereignty.

A statement from the Syrian Foreign Ministry said, "Syria reiterates its categorical rejection of any American-Turkish agreement." The statement also noted that "such a deal would constitute a blatant attack on the sovereignty and unity of the country." The reaction came after Turkey said it will continue to discuss the planned demilitarisation zone in northern Syria with the US after threatening to launch a new cross-border incursion into the country.

Turkey

- During a telephonic conversation with his counterpart, Mark Esper on July 29, Turkish Defence Minister, Hulusi Akar called on the US to end its support for the Kurdish militants, which is a source of tension between the two countries.

Following Akar's conversation, the Turkish Defence Ministry stated, "During the call, Minister Akar stated that Turkey's expectation from the US is to terminate entirely its support for the PKK/YPG - Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) - terror organisation." He also said that Turkey wants a 30-40 kilometres safe zone along the Turkish-Syrian border that would be controlled by Turkey in coordination with the US. He stressed that Turkey is "the only appropriate, ready and capable force" in the region to control the zone. Ankara also wants the area to be cleared of the YPG, and weapons to be collected and

all tunnels and shelters of the militants to be destroyed. Turkey views the YPG as the Syrian branch of the homegrown PKK militant group, which has been fighting for autonomy for decades. Like Ankara, the US has listed the PKK as a terrorist group, but views the YPG as an ally in its fight against Daesh. Ankara suspects that the US and its allies have been helping the Kurdish militants based in east of the Euphrates river inside Syria to establish a permanent foothold in the region.

- On July 27, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan criticised the recent wave of terror and bloodshed waged by Israel against the Palestinians, saying Ankara will oppose anyone who supports the Tel Aviv regime.

During his address to the provincial officials from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Ankara, Erdogan said, “Whoever is on the side of Israel, let everyone know that we are against them.” The remarks came amid a new wave of Israeli crackdowns in the occupied Palestinian territories as regime forces continue with demolition of Palestinian houses in occupied areas in the West Bank and in the Jerusalem al-Quds.

- On July 24, Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu said Ankara is not satisfied with new US proposals for a safe zone in northern Syria, warning that Turkey is running out of patience with Washington over the issue.

Turkey has been angered by US support for the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) forces based east of the Euphrates River. Ankara views the armed Kurds in north-eastern Syria as an extension of the outlawed militants of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Turkey has been in talks with the US over the establishment of a militant-free safe zone across its border in northern Syria. The US special envoy for Syria, James Jeffrey, held talks with Turkish officials in Ankara on the details of the safe zone where he presented new proposals. During a press conference in Ankara, Cavusoglu said that the two allies had failed to agree on how deep the safe zone would be, who would control it and whether the area would be completely cleared of the Kurdish militants.

UAE

- In an op-ed published in *The Washington Post* on July 22, UAE’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash said his country is not leaving Yemen despite a redeployment of its forces in the country.

The UAE is a key partner in the Saudi-led military coalition which intervened in Yemen in 2015 to back the internationally recognised government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi against Houthi rebels. Earlier in July 2019, it said it was redeploying and reducing troops across Yemen and moving from a “military-first” strategy to a “peace-first” plan. In the op-ed Gargash noted, “Just to be clear, the UAE and the rest of the coalition are not leaving Yemen”.

He also stated, “While we will operate differently, our military presence will remain.” In a related development on July 23, 2019, the Houthis’ top political leader, Mahdi al-Mashat said the group was ready to stop attacks against Saudi Arabia and engage in a dialogue with it but on certain conditions. He said, “We are fully prepared to stop missile and air strikes if the enemy takes similar measures and facilitates the flow of basic aid through ports, and then we can begin a political process.” He also denied that the Houthis were “puppets” of Iran as purported by the US and its Saudi and Emirati allies.

Yemen

- On July 29, at least 13 civilians, including children, were killed in air strikes carried out by the Saudi-led coalition on a market in Yemen’s northern Saada province.

Colonel Turki alMalki, spokesman of the Saudi-led coalition, accused the Houthis of attacking the market but did not specify the type of assault or confirm the number killed. He said, “The attack carried out by the Houthis on Al Thabet market is a terrorist act to spite Yemenis and the tribes of Al Thabet.” Saudi Arabia is leading the Western-backed alliance that intervened in Yemen in 2015 to try to restore the internationally recognised government, which was ousted from power in the capital Sanaa by the Houthis in late 2014. The movement has increased missile and drone attacks on Saudi cities, and the coalition has responded with air strikes on Houthi targets, mostly around Sanaa.

- On July 28, Yemeni Armed Forces destroyed a military command centre in Saudi Arabia’s southern province of Najran after targeting it with a domestically-manufactured ballistic missile.

Brigadier General Yahya Saree, the spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces, told Yemen’s al-Masirah news website that the short-range ballistic missile successfully hit a command centre in Saqqam area. He added that the missile destroyed the base leaving a large number of Saudi-led troops either killed or wounded. The missile launch came a few hours after fresh drone attacks by Yemeni forces on an airport in Najran. According to Saree, the Yemeni forces used Qasif-K2 combat drones to first target a command and control centre at the Najran airport and later hangers and military sites there. Yemeni forces regularly target positions inside Saudi Arabia in retaliation for the Saudi-led war on Yemen, which started in March 2015.

---Muhammad Shoaib

SOUTH ASIA: I

Pakistan

External

- Citing a White House factsheet, *Dawn* reported on July 31 that the US and Pakistan can further boost bilateral trade if their strategic ties continue to improve.

The factsheet titled “Working toward Peace and Stability: Building Economic Prosperity” noted that Pakistan and the US traded \$6.6 billion worth of goods in 2018. Relations between Washington and Islamabad have seen considerable improvement in recent months as Pakistan is seen as a crucial player in facilitating dialogue between the US and the Afghan Taliban.

- According to Pakistan Foreign Office on July 30, a special caravan of more than 500 Indian Sikh pilgrims crossed over to Pakistan through the Wagah border and visited Nankana Sahib to celebrate the 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak.

In November 2018, both Pakistan and India agreed to set up the Kartarpur corridor to link the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib which is located in Pakistan’s Narowal district. Gurdwara Darbar Sahib is the final resting place of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion.

- Speaking at the National Assembly on July 29, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that the next round of the intra-Afghan dialogue would be held in Norway, Oslo.

Foreign Minister Qureshi highlighted Pakistan’s efforts for peace in Afghanistan. He noted that the world, particularly the US, had now began to acknowledge Pakistan’s role in the ongoing Afghan Peace Process. He said that Pakistan is not a guarantor but only facilitator in the Afghan Peace Process. The Foreign Minister did not specify the dates of the summit. However, according to media reports, the talks might begin in August 2019. The Taliban have so far refused to speak to Ashraf Ghani’s government, which they consider illegitimate.

- According to the US Department of State on July 26, the Trump Administration approved Foreign Military Sale (FMS) worth \$125 million to Pakistan for providing technical support to the country’s F-16 fleet.

The State Department said that the proposed sale would support “the foreign policy and national security of the US by protecting US technology through the continued presence of US personnel that provide 24/7 end-use monitoring.” The development follows a meeting between US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Imran Khan in Washington on July 22, 2019. In a separate development, the US also approved \$670 million worth of support for India’s C-17 transport plane fleet. The State Department, however, said that the proposed sale would “not alter the basic military balance in the region.”

- According to *Dawn* on July 27, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Overseas Pakistanis, Syed Zulfiqar Bukhari met with US President Donald Trump's daughter and Adviser, Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner in the US.

According to Pakistan's government, Bukhari and Ivanka agreed on strengthening cooperation between Pakistan and the US in multiple sectors, including women's development, employment opportunities, technical training and human resource development.

- Speaking at the joint press conference with Prime Minister Imran Khan in Washington on July 22, US President Donald Trump said that he is ready to mediate the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India. President Trump added that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked him to be a "mediator or arbitrator in Kashmir".

Prime Minister Khan told Donald Trump that over a billion people at the moment are "held hostage to (the) Kashmir situation." He said that Pakistan has made all overtures to India to start a dialogue and resolve differences, however, there is no progress as yet. The Pakistani Premier expressed hope that President Trump, being a leader of the world's most powerful country, would play a role for peace in the subcontinent. Both leaders held comprehensive discussions on strengthening the partnership between Pakistan and the US and enhancing cooperation between the two countries. President Trump said that Pakistan did not respect the US in the past but "they are helping us a lot now on Afghanistan." The meeting between the two leaders came as the Trump Administration seeks Pakistan's help in pressuring the Afghan Taliban to agree to a cease-fire and hold direct talks with the Afghan government. A high-level delegation including Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and DG Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Faiz Hameed accompanied Prime Minister Imran Khan during his Washington's visit.

In a related development, Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) denied that Narendra Modi had requested President Trump to play a role of mediator in Kashmir saying "all outstanding issues with Pakistan are discussed only bilaterally." The MEA said "Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration provide the basis to resolve all issues between Pakistan and India bilaterally".

- On May 23, Prime Minister, Imran Khan addressed members of the US Congress at Capitol Hill. The Premier also met with US House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi. During the meeting with PM Khan, Pelosi said that the US values the "critical relationship and partnership" with Pakistan.
- On July 24, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited the US State Department and met with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Bajwa also visited Pentagon and met Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Joseph Dunford, acting US Defence Secretary, Richard V. Spencer and the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of

Staff, General Mark Milley. The military leadership of both sides held comprehensive talks on the matters related to security and bilateral military cooperation.

- On July 17, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Pakistan to allow India consular access to Commander Kulbushan Jadhav after it found that Pakistan breached its obligation under Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

The court, however, rejected India's demand that Jadhav's conviction by a Pakistani military court be annulled. The court declared that Pakistan's government should take the "effective review and reconsideration" of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav. Following the decision, Pakistan's Foreign Office said that Pakistan as a "responsible state" would grant consular access to Kulbushan Jadhav according to Pakistani laws. Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations provides that consular officers have the right to arrange legal representation for a detained national of the sending state. Pakistan had argued that Jadhav was not given consular access because he had been convicted of "espionage". The Court, however, noted that Article 36 does not "exclude from its scope certain categories of persons, such as those suspected of espionage." Prime Minister Imran Khan welcomed the ICJ's decision for not acquitting Jadhav and said he was "guilty of crimes against the people of Pakistan." Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also welcomed the ICJ's decision on granting India consular access to Jadhav.

Pakistan Internal

- On July 30, at least 18 people were killed when a Pakistan Army plane crashed into a residential area in Rawalpindi.

Five crew members including two Lieutenant Colonels and 13 civilians were among the dead. A number of houses were also damaged following the plane crash. It remains unclear what caused the plane to crash.

- Addressing a gathering on the National Minority Day in Islamabad on July 29, Prime Minister Imran Khan assured the minority communities in Pakistan that the government would protect the places of worship of all religions.

The Prime Minister said that the forced conversions of religious minorities needs to be stopped as it violates Islamic values and the Constitution. While discussing the Sikh community, Imran Khan said that measures have been taken to facilitate them through the Kartarpur Corridor, that is scheduled to be opened in November 2019.

- According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on July 27, at least 10 personnel of the Pakistan Armed Forces, including a Captain were killed in two separate terrorist

attacks, one along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in North Waziristan and the other in Balochistan.

Six soldiers of Pakistan Army were killed in North Waziristan when their vehicle was attacked by terrorists from the Afghan side of the border. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack. In another attack, at least 4 personnel of the Frontier Corps (FC) were killed after their vehicle was ambushed by terrorists during a combing operation in Balochistan.

In a separate development on July 30, at least 5 people including a police official were killed and 30 others were injured following a terrorist attack targeting a police vehicle in Quetta. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.

- On July 24, Pakistan Foreign Office summoned the Indian Deputy High Commissioner, Gaurav Ahluwalia and condemned the ceasefire violations by the Indian troops along the Line of Control (LoC) on July 22 and 23, 2019.

At least two people were killed after Indian troops fired from across the LoC. Pakistan frequently cautions India not to threaten regional peace and security and has urged New Delhi to respect the 2003 Ceasefire arrangement. Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that the increased attacks from across the LoC indicates India's "frustration due to failure in IOK." In a related development on July 29, 2019, Pakistan's Foreign Office once again summoned the Indian Deputy High Commissioner after Indian troops fired from across the LoC in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) in which at least one woman was killed.

- On July 20, elections were held on 16 Provincial Assembly seats in merged districts of erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

In 2018, the seven tribal districts were merged into the KPK province. Previously these tribal areas were federally administered and residents could only vote for representatives in the National Assembly.

India

- On July 23, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the trust vote after defeating Congress in the Karnataka State Assembly.

Earlier in July 2019, more than a dozen legislators quit from a Congress coalition, triggering a majority test in the state assembly. The BJP won the confidence vote by a margin of six votes in the Karnataka assembly. According to analysts, the BJP has sought to strengthen its support base in Southern India which is long dominated by regional parties.

- On July 22, India successfully launched its lunar mission, Chandrayaan-2 which would travel for two months before positioning itself in a circular orbit 62 miles above the moon's surface.

If the mission is successful, India would become the fourth country to land on the Moon's surface. China, Russia and the US are the only other nations to have sent missions to the moon.

---Muhammad Abdul Qadeer

SOUTH ASIA II

Afghanistan

- On July 31, at least 34 people, including women and children, were killed in a roadside bomb blast in Herat-Kandahar Highway.

The incident occurred in Shawiz area when a bus carrying dozens of passengers was travelling to Farah province from the western province of Herat. No group claimed responsibility for the attack. In a related incident on July 29, 2019, two US servicemen were killed in an insider attack by Afghan soldiers.

- Washington Post reported on July 29 that US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo said that President Donald Trump ordered him to reduce the number of American troops in Afghanistan by the 2020 election.

Pompeo said, "That's my directive from the President of the United States. He's been unambiguous: End the endless wars. Drawdown. Reduce. It won't just be us." He also suggested that troop withdrawal is connected to how the US President views his job performance, saying a reduction of forces is "not only my expectation, it would be job-enhancing". Pompeo also said that the US hopes the overall need for combat forces in the region is reduced.

- On July 29, US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), John F. Sopko said that Afghan Security Forces may not be capable of sustaining peace, even if a deal with the Taliban is reached.

Sopko said that Afghan military forces face heavy turnover rates and a lack of quality equipment; shortcomings that are keeping the country from being self-sustaining even after 18 years of war and \$83 billion in US security support. He added that the basic problem was often just trying to figure out who was in charge and that no single person, agency, military service, or country responsible (was) for the oversight of all US and international activities to develop the Afghan security forces. SIGAR estimates that the US alone has spent about \$18 billion to equip Afghan Security Forces, buying more than 600,000 weapons, 70,000 vehicles and more than 200 aircraft. He also mentioned that the US and NATO efforts have often been disorganised, with Afghan forces suffering as a result. Sopko concluded that "failure to plan now is planning to fail once peace is declared."

- On July 28, the Taliban reiterated that the intra-Afghan negotiations will only occur after the announcement of a timetable for the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

A Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, tweeted that the talks will be held among all parties and that the Afghan government will attend as a participant, not as other side of the talks. On July 26, 2019, the State Minister for Peace, Abdul Salam Rahimi said that direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban will start within the next two weeks. US Special

Representative on Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad also clarified that the talks will happen after the US concludes its own agreement with the Taliban. Meanwhile, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani said that only the government has the authority to negotiate with the Taliban. He added that Taliban will “regret” if they failed to use the current opportunity for peace in the country.

- On July 28, an attack on a former interior minister and vice-presidential candidate’s political office left at least 20 people dead and 50 others wounded in Kabul.
- On July 25, at least 11 people were killed and 45 others wounded in three explosions in Kabul.

According to the Ministry of Interior, the first blast occurred when a suicide bomber on a motorbike targeted a bus carrying employees of the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum in Macrorayan-e-Kohna area, then a suicide bomber detonated his explosives near the bus, killing eight employees including five women and a child. The third blast was a car bombing near the industrial park in PD9 area. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the third blast and claimed that they targeted a convoy of foreign troops. In a related incident on July 19, 2019 an explosion near Kabul University left at least eight people dead.

- On July 25, US chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford visited Kabul and met with Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani.

During his meeting with Ghani, Dunford received detailed briefings on the situation in the country. Dunford learned about progress being made regarding the upcoming Afghan Presidential elections, operations against the Taliban, counterterrorism efforts against ISIS and Al-Qaida and coalition efforts to train the Afghan military. Dunford said negotiations with the Taliban have not changed the military mission in Afghanistan. He added that he wanted to take the pulse of operations in the country in advance of the upcoming presidential election. On July 20, 2019, Commander of the US Central Command, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie met with Afghanistan’s Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul and assured Washington’s support for the Afghan Security Forces against the Taliban insurgency across the country. The Pentagon’s top officials’ back to back visits to Afghanistan and their assurances for the support and training of Afghan Security Forces suggest that the US military mission in the country is far from over. Earlier, on July 17, 2019, the Pentagon in a new report warned that a robust counterterrorism capability must remain in Afghanistan against groups including al-Qaeda, even if a peace deal with the Taliban is secured.

- On July 25, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo and Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani agreed during a telephonic conversation to accelerate efforts toward ending the Afghan war through negotiations.

Pompeo assured Ghani that US President's South Asia strategy, including the US commitment for a condition-based drawdown, has not changed, and that all the efforts of US officials, including the US Special Envoy for Afghan peace Zalmay Khalilzad, is going in that direction. Meanwhile, Ghani welcomed US involvement in the Afghan peace process and added that Kabul will work side-by-side with Washington for bringing a durable peace in Afghanistan. In a related development on July 20, 2019, US Republican Senator, Lindsey Graham said in a tweet that he hopes the Trump Administration will not give into absurd Taliban demands for US withdrawal within 18 months, regardless of conditions on the ground.

- On July 25, the Taliban captured the Keran Wa Manjan district in the northern Badakhshan province.

The district police chief along with 40 soldiers fled to the neighbouring Nuristan Province. The police chief criticised government forces for not sending reinforcements to the district. In another incident on July 27, 2019, at least 30 members of the pro-government forces were reportedly killed in clashes in the northeastern Takhar province.

- On July 24, Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah's Office said that the Taliban can take part in the upcoming presidential elections after the group begins negotiations with the Afghan government.

The Taliban have consistently refused to talk to the Afghan government amid ongoing peace efforts by Kabul and Washington. The statement from Abdullah's office came a day after Pakistani Prime Minister, Imran Khan said in Washington that the upcoming elections in Afghanistan should be inclusive so that the Taliban can also participate in the race. Meanwhile, a former Taliban member, Sayed Akbar Agha said the group will never participate in the elections in the presence of foreign forces in the country. Earlier, on July 16, 2019, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani said that a possible peace deal – which will potentially take place in the coming weeks – will not impact the upcoming presidential elections, scheduled for September 28, 2019.

- On July 24, a Pakistan-funded 100 bed hospital was handed over to Afghan authorities in Logar.

Afghan Public Health Minister, Ferozuddin Feroz Khan and Pakistan's Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Shehryar Khan Afridi inaugurated the hospital. The hospital was built at a cost of \$18 million. Earlier, on April 20, 2019, Pakistan had gifted a 200-bed state-of-the-art Muhammad Ali Jinnah Hospital to the government of Afghanistan.

- On July 23, the Afghan government sought clarification from the White House after US President Donald Trump said that he could easily win the Afghan war by wiping out the country but did not “want to kill 10 million people”.

President Trump made the remarks at the White House, where he was hosting Pakistan's Prime Minister, Imran Khan. President Trump said, "I have plans on Afghanistan that, if I wanted to win that war, Afghanistan would be wiped off the face of the Earth. It would be gone. It would be over in 10 days. And I don't want to do, I don't want to go that route." Afghanistan's Presidential Palace responded, "The Afghan nation has not and will never allow any foreign power to determine its fate. While the Afghan government supports the US efforts for ensuring peace in Afghanistan, the government underscores that foreign heads of state cannot determine Afghanistan's fate in the absence of the Afghan leadership." During his comments, President Trump also said that Pakistan was helping the US extricate itself from Afghanistan, where Washington was acting as a policeman rather than fighting a war. PM Khan assured his full support for a peaceful settlement of Afghan conflict through political negotiations with the Taliban.

- On July 22, an Afghan forces air strike killed at least 8 civilians, including six children, in Logar province.

According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), since March 21, 2019, 596 civilians were killed and 1,892 others wounded in clashes between government forces and the Taliban and other attacks by militants in Afghanistan

- *The Economic Times* reported on July 19 that the German Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Markus Potzel said the international community would like to see a larger regional role for India in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and its resolution.

Germany co-hosted an intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha on July 7-8, 2019. India had previously refused to be a part of talks with the Taliban directly, and sent only retired officials in a non-official capacity for one round of talks in Moscow in 2018.

- On July 19, the fifth round of China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Practical Cooperation Dialogue (CAPPD) was held in Islamabad.

Representatives from the three countries reiterated their resolve to support a political settlement of the Afghan conflict through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. The three sides discussed implementation status of various projects among Pakistan, Afghanistan and China in the areas of education, health, sports, culture and capacity building. They reaffirmed the commitment to further strengthening practical cooperation to achieve the mutually beneficial goals of sustainable peace, development and prosperity. The CAPPD mechanism was established in 2017 to achieve the three-fold objective of promoting trilateral engagement, enhancing economic cooperation and improving connectivity including through the Belt and Road Initiative.

- On July 18, at least 12 people were killed and 60 others wounded in a Taliban attack on Kandahar police headquarters.

Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani condemned the attack and said the Afghan government is seeking ways for peace but the Taliban through such attacks show that they do not want peace and stability. The National Directorate of Security (NDS) alleged that the attack was plotted in Pakistan. However, Pakistan's Foreign Office rejected the allegations. A Taliban spokesman also rejected the NDS remarks and said the attack was plotted within the country. In a related incident, at least 30 Afghan elite commandoes along with an Army General were killed in a Taliban ambush in Bidghis province. In another incident, a commander of the Afghan National Army was killed in an attack by two Army soldiers, who were believed to be affiliated to the Taliban, in the central province of Ghazni.

- On July 16, a new report noted that the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, the Afghan government and their international partners do not have a clear roadmap for peace and elections.

The study titled “The First Pre-Election Day Assessment Report” has been conducted by the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) and Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA). The study indicated that – Lack of interest of the international community towards the electoral process; the election commission's failure to drop fake names from voters' lists; ambiguity about the use of biometric devices in the elections; and the nature of relations between the election commission and the government – are the main factors affecting the interest of the Afghan government, the international community and the election commission to hold the upcoming presidential elections. The report came a day after Afghanistan's Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah warned that the upcoming presidential elections should lead the country towards stability, not a crisis, as he stressed on transparency in the electoral process. Abdullah warned that the country will fall into an “unbearable tragedy” if the problems of the 2014 presidential elections were repeated in the upcoming polls, scheduled for September 28, 2019. On July 17, 2019, presidential candidate, Ahmad Wali Massoud said that President Ashraf Ghani is trying to manipulate the elections so that he can remain in power for another term. He added, “They (government officials) are distributing money (to the people) when they visit provinces. They collect stickers and signatures in every corner they go. They ask people to promise. They appoint their favourites who are ready to commit fraud (in the elections).”

---Kashif Hussain

UNITED NATIONS

- On July 30, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released its new report noting that at least 3,812 Afghan civilians were killed or wounded in the first half of 2019 in the war against militant groups.
- On July 19, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said that the “deliberate targeting of educational facilities” during armed conflict was “a war crime.”

The UNAMA noted that large number civilian casualties in the first half of 2019 represents a big increase in the number of casualties caused by government and foreign forces. The report indicated that ground raids and clashes caused the most civilian casualties, followed by bomb attacks and air strikes. According to the report, the Taliban and Daesh killed 531 Afghans and wounded 1,437 between January 1 and June 30, 2019. These groups have deliberately targeted 985 civilians, including government officials, tribal elders, aid workers, and religious scholars.

In a related development on July 19, 2019, the UNAMA said that the “deliberate targeting of educational facilities” during armed conflict was “a war crime.” Following the July 26, 2019, bomb attack near the entrance to Kabul University, the UNAMA said the University “was (the) intentional focus of the attack.” According to the UN, at least “eight civilians” were killed and 33 others wounded. However, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

- On July 26, Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, denounced the world’s indifference to civilian casualties in Syria owing to continued air strikes, and called it a “failure of leadership” by the world’s most powerful countries.

Michelle Bachelet said, “Despite repeated calls by the United Nations to respect the principle of precaution and distinction in their conduct of hostilities, this latest relentless campaign of airstrikes by the Government and its allies has continued to hit medical facilities, schools and other civilian infrastructure such as markets and bakeries.” She noted that attacks against civilian targets amount to war crimes and those who conducted them were criminally responsible for the casualties. According to the UN, eight locations in Idlib and two in rural Aleppo have witnessed civilian casualties, resulting in at least 103 civilian deaths, including some 26 children since July 16, 2019. Bachelet said that the UNSC continues to be in a paralysed state owing to persistent failure of its five Permanent Members to agree to use their power and influence to stop the fighting and killing once and for all. The UN Human Rights Office noted that “Idlib and surrounding areas are witnessing a grave military escalation with violations of human rights, despite being the subject of the 2017 de-escalation agreement, and the 2018 de-militarised zone agreement. Bachelet called for cessation of hostilities and urged influential parties to “urgently use their influence” to halt the current military campaign and “bring the warring parties back to the negotiating table”.

- On July 22, three top UN officials asserted that the Israeli authorities' destruction of homes in the Palestinian community of Sur Bahir was "not compatible" with Israel's "obligations under international humanitarian law."

Jamie McGoldrick, UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Gwyn Lewis, Director of West Bank Operations for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and James Heenan, Head of the UN Human Rights Office in the area, said, in a joint statement, "Among other things, the destruction of private property in occupied territory is only permissible where rendered absolutely necessary for military operations, which is not applicable". The statement added, "Furthermore, it results in forced evictions, and contributes to the risk of forcible transfer facing many Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem." According to the UN, Israeli forces conducted the operation on July 22, 2019, and forced families out of their homes and demolished a number of residential buildings on the East Jerusalem side of the barrier. Meanwhile, Israel's Supreme Court has reportedly ruled that the houses were built too close to the separation barrier in the West Bank which violated a construction ban. However, the joint statement noted that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had ruled in 2004 against the Israeli construction of a barrier, and had found its parts running inside the West Bank were a violation of Israel's obligations under international law. In its July 2004 resolution, the UNGA had also demanded Israel comply with its legal obligations as stated in the ICJ's advisory opinion.

- On July 18, Executive Secretary of the UN regional commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, said that Asia and the Pacific regions were on course to miss all of the 17 Goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development unless measures to accelerate progress were taken.

Armida Alisjahbana also introduced ESCAP's latest Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report during his visit to New York to participate in the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. According to the UN, the ESCAP's report shows that the region was actually going backwards. The goals which the region is likely to miss are related to access to clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and responsible consumption and production (Goal 11). Regarding slow progress on meeting the goals, Alisjahbana said, "There is water scarcity, because of the pressure of urbanisation, and the management of natural resources and the environment are making the situation worse. As for moving towards sustainable consumption, that has to do with behaviour and lifestyle. With increasing wealth, you consume more, but what you consume is something that is actually not sustainable."

- On July 18, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, expressed hope that despite challenges, Yemen could finally be "nearing the end of its war."

Martin Griffiths said, “It was not me, but a very senior and wise official in the region who recently said that this war can end this year.” Griffiths also noted that he had recently held meetings with the leadership of both the pro-Government coalition, and the Houthi rebel movement who had expressed “unanimous desire” to move towards a political solution. While praising the implementation of the 2018 Stockholm Agreement which provided a framework in and around the crucial port city of Hudaydah, he expressed concerns over continued Houthi attacks on civilian infrastructure across the Saudi border, and dangers of Yemen being dragged into a regional war, following weeks of tension in the key shipping lanes of the Gulf. Meanwhile, Head of the World Food Programme (WFP) David Beasley noted that an agreement over the full resumption of food aid to some Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen was “within reach.” Beasley made these comments following his reluctant decision to suspend some aid in June 2019, owing to the persistent diversion by some Houthi leaders of emergency food supplies away from its intended civilians. The UNSC also urged Yemen’s warring parties to respect international humanitarian law and provide unhindered access to civilians and more funding to provide lifesaving services.

- On July 16, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peace-building Affairs, DiCarlo briefed the UNSC on the current situation in Ukraine and noted that human cost of the conflict in the country was growing.

DiCarlo said that the ongoing conflict in the eastern Donbas region of the country was putting lives of thousands of people in the area in great danger, for instance, indiscriminate shelling on a daily basis, and the threat of landmines. As of June 30, 2019, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) has recorded 91 conflict-related civilian casualties, including 13 deaths. She also noted that attempts to reach agreement on a ceasefire have persistently failed, despite progress by the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine comprising Ukraine, Russia and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in improving the security and humanitarian situation.

--- Moiz Khan