Weekly Media Updates (7-13 August, 2017)

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North Africa

Houthis Obstructing Chinese Mediation in Yemen

Reportedly, the revolutionary Houthi group in Yemen is making all efforts to stop China from being a third party in the ongoing conflict in the country.¹ Reports also add that in recent weeks, China has shown keen interest to have a talk with UN envoy for Yemen Mr. Ismail Ould in order to facilitate the negotiations between warring factions; however, the Houthis are creating hindrances in the way. In a telephonic conversation, the spokesperson of current Yemeni government told Asharqal-Awsat that efforts of big powers to resume the dialogue with the UN Envoy are being thwarted by the Houthis, who seem to be in no mood to resolve the issue. The Deputy Foreign Minister of Yemen told the reporters that the efforts of China's Ambassador in Yemen to bring the Houthis on the table and resume the dialogue with Mr. Ould is not yielding any result because of the indifferent attitude of Houthis leadership. They have also rejected the Chinese initiative in the conflict and said that China needs not be the party to the current process.

Egypt and Russia Facilitate Truce in Northern Yemen

According to Al-Ahram report with reference to MENA news agency, Egypt and Russia have been able to find truce between President Assad's regime and moderate Islamist forces, which are fighting a raging battle in the city of Homs in northern Syria.² The reports further add that it is the second time in less than two weeks that truce has been reached in Syria due to joint efforts of both Russia and Egypt. The agreement was reached after series of talks between Russian officials and the representatives of the moderate Islamist forces in Cairo. However, the Russia defense sources later made it clear that the truce would not include the fighters from the ISIS and other militant affiliates.

Libyan Leaders to Hold Talks in Moscow

According to head of the Russian contact group on Libya Mr. Lev, President of the Government of National Accord in Libya Mr. Sarraj and strongman of eastern Libya Colonel Haftar would meet in Moscow to discuss the current Libyan crisis.³

¹ Asharqal-Awsat, an Arabic Daily

https://aawsat.com/home/article/996926/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%88%D $9\%\,86-\%\,D9\%\,8A\%\,D8\%\,B9\%\,D8\%\,B1\%\,D9\%\,82\%\,D9\%\,84\%\,D9\%\,88\%\,D9\%\,86-$

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²Ahram online http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/274706/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-and-Russia-broker-

truce-between-Syrian-regim.aspx

AL-Hayat, an Arabic Daily http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/23396255/%D8%AD%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%B1- $\% \, D9\% \, 88\% \, D8\% \, A7\% \, D9\% \, 84\% \, D8\% \, B3\% \, D8\% \, B1\% \, D8\% \, A7\% \, D8\% \, AC-\% \, D9\% \, 81\% \, D9\% \, 8A-10\% \, D8\% \, A7\% \, D9\% \, D9$ %D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%88-%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%8B

Both would reach Tobruk in Libya and hold a comprehensive talk on the series of issues that have intrigued the Libyan politics for more than six years. Apart from various other issues, terrorism, political factionalism, migration crisis and internal security matters are likely to dominate the talk between the two sides. Mr. Lev, the head of Russian contact group, which was formed recently by the Russia Parliament, told that Russia being the host expects that all issues of complicated nature would be brought on the table. It is worth mentioning here that both the leaders have already met in France after new French President, Mr. Macron had invited them for talks. In Paris, both had agreed to ceasefire and on a 10-point formula but the ceasefire was partially implemented due to persisting multiple differences between various groups controlled by these two leaders.

Central Asia

• Turkmenistan President Visits Azerbaijan

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov paid official visit to Azerbaijan on 8-9 August 2017. He held discussions with President Ilham Aliyev and other Azeri authorities in Baku. Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan are Caspian Sea littoral states and want to develop markets for energy using different routes to Europe. The visiting President called for changing the Caspian Sea basin into a 'territory of stability, progress and broad international partnership in Eurasia.'⁴

Trade between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan has been increasing. In the last six months this year it increased by 40 per cent corresponding to the same period in 2016. Turkey is looking for new markets for its hydrocarbon resources. Russia has reportedly stopped buying gas from Turkmenistan, and on the other hand, China, which has been the largest importer of Turkmenistan gas, is facing growth slowdown. It can sell its gas to Europe by using the route through Azerbaijan.

The Turkmenistan President also invited President Ilham Aliyev to the opening ceremony of the 5th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in September 2017 in Ashgabat.

China

• Mao Siwei translates Indian and Bhutanese documents on Doklam Mr Mao Siwei, former Chinese Consul General in Kolkata has translated Indian and Bhutanese official statements on Doklam. Following two documents has been translated by Mr Mao from English to Chinese on 11 August 2017.

⁴ AzerNews, "President: Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan leading powers in energy production," 10 August 2017, https://www.azernews.az/nation/117422.html

(i)Press Releases by MEA, GOI titled 'Recent Developments in Doklam Area' issued on June 30, 2017. (b) Press Release by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan on June 29, 2017.

The Chinese versions of the documents are available at the following link.⁵

CMC calls for study of Xi's speeches

The Central Military Commission (CMC) on 8 August told the armed forces to study the speeches made by President Xi Jinping around the Army Day and strengthen their sense of loyalty and responsibility, according to an official circular.

Study of Xi's speeches is of great significance to inspire the military to unite more closely around the Communist Party of China Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, according to the circular issued by the general office of the CMC.⁶

• Bank official says equity investment will pave way for B&R projects

Equity and debt financial instruments should play a major role in plugging the financing gap for projects in the Belt and Road initiative, the Vice Governor of the Chinese central bank said on 12 August.

"There is a huge funding demand to be met in the coming years, and equity investment should be used as much as possible to support financing of the initiative," Yin Yong, Vice Governor of the People's Bank of China told the CF40 Yichun Forum held on12 August.

The demand for financing for infrastructural construction projects in areas involved is expected to increase by \$600 billion a year, according to Yin. He said equity investments are quite suitable for long-term projects because they improve the financing capacity for a project by leveraging additional funding from various sources.⁷

• China, Pakistan vow to further deepen bilateral pragmatic cooperation China and Pakistan on 13 August promised to deepen their pragmatic cooperation in various fields during a meeting between Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and visiting Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang.

⁶ "CMC calls for study of Xi's speeches", Ministry of Defense, Peoples Republic of China, August 8, 2017, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2017-08/08/content_4788183.htm (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

⁵ http;//mp.weixin.qq.com/s/hookıulvSt3tm9NYHMsvdA

⁷ "Bank official says equity investment will pave way for B&R projects", Belt and Road Portal, August 14, 2017, https://.eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/23307.htm (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

Wang Yang is in Pakistan to attend activities marking the 70th anniversary of Pakistan's independence at the invitation of the Pakistani government.

Noting that China and Pakistan are "iron friends" and all-weather partners of strategic cooperation who always understand and support each other, Wang said Chinese President Xi Jinping's successful visit to Pakistan in 2015 has ushered in a new chapter of the relations between the two countries.

China would like to join hands with Pakistan to well implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries and ensure that more fruitful results will be achieved in bilateral cooperation, he said. With regard to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative, Wang expressed the hope that the two countries strengthen coordination and make good plan and design from a long-term and top-level perspective.⁸

• China's comprehensive moves in advancing rule of law

The 12th National People's Congress (NPC)and its standing committee have formulated 20 laws and passed 39 decisions to revise 100 laws as of the end of June, data from the NPC showed.⁹

European Union

• Iran Signed Deal with French Car Company Renault

Iran has signed a deal with French car company Renault to produce 150,00 cars yearly. It was termed as Iran's biggest car deal which is worth 660 million euros. European companies are eyeing Iranian market after the nuclear deal signed in 2015, subsequently lifting the international sanctions. French companies have entered the business deals with Iran.¹⁰

⁸ "China, Pakistan vow to further deepen bilateral pragmatic cooperation", Belt and Road Portal, August 14, 2017, https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/23305.htm (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

⁹ "Backgrounder: China's comprehensive moves in advancing rule of law", china.org.cn, August 10, 2017, http://www.china.org.cn/china/Off_the_Wire/2017-08/10/content_41387892.htm (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

¹⁰ Amir Vahdat, Iran signs its biggest-ever car deal with France's Renault, ABC News, August 7, 2017, http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iran-signs-biggest-car-deal-frances-renault-49072554

• The Public Ethics Bill Passed in France

The bill aims to promote transparency in public life. French President Macron promised to clean up country's politics in his electoral campaign. 412 MPs supported the bill, which will end cash contributions for lawmakers to spend on areas and NGOs of their wishes. The parliament had already voted through aspects of the law prohibiting MPs and ministers from employing their own family members. This issue was raised during in French presidential campaign. It was also alleged that Republican candidate Francois Fillon employed his wife as a publicly-funded assistant for years with little proof of work.¹¹

Poland and the EU

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Foreign Minister of Poland, Witold Waszczykowski said that European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans is trying to "deprive Poland of its position" in the EU. The Polish foreign minister argued that European Commission decisions are a "smoke screen" covering up energy security and post-Brexit common market problems as well as "protectionist" decisions. He added, "We prefer to discuss... these issues but not directly (with) Mr Timmermans." Currently, Poland has difference over some issues with the EU. The European Commission has expressed concerns over Polish government decisions over judicial changes or media issues.

• The EU Humanitarian Aid to Assam and Manipur

The EU has offered humanitarian assistance to flood affected states of India - Assam and Manipur. The EU statement states that it will provide 200,000 euros to these states. David Sevcik, Head of the South Asia Regional Office for the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), stated, "the EU contribution underlines our commitment to the people of India, many of whom have suffered devastating losses as a result of the flooding." Reportedly, the EU also supports the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) in distribution of emergency relief items like family tents, tarpaulins, temporary sanitation facilities and mosquito nets.¹⁴

¹¹ France passes law to clean up politics in wake of fake jobs scandal, France 24, August 10, 2017, http://www.france24.com/en/20170810-france-passes-law-clean-politics-wake-fake-jobs-scandal-macron

¹² European Commission trying to 'deprive Poland of its position': Polish FM, Radio Poland, August 9, 2017, http://www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/320121,European-Commission-trying-to-deprive-Poland-of-its-position-Polish-FM

¹³ EU offers aid to flood-affected Assam, Manipur, Business Standard, August 11, 2017, http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/eu-offers-aid-to-flood-affected-assammanipur-117081101151 1.html

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

• North Korea condemns UNSC sanctions, intensifies threat

On August 7, 2017 North Korea condemned United National Security Council's new sanction over its ICBM test. In a statement issued through KCNA, Pyongyang warned the US by saying, "We are ready to respond with far bigger actions to make the U.S. pay a price for its violent crime against our country and people," and vowed to take a "stern action of justice". The statement also reiterated that Pyongyang will not put its nuclear weapons on the negotiation table, pledging to stick to its byongjin policy; nuclear armament and economic development simultaneously.¹⁵

On August 8, 2017 North Korea's Asia-Pacific Peace Committee also issued threat warning against the US. A statement issued in KCNA, spokesperson of the Committee said, "(Enemies) should not forget that we are ready to ruthlessly take strategic measures involving physical actions by fully mobilizing our national power,".¹⁶

On August 9, North Korea further intensified its threat. The North's Strategic Force said it's "now carefully examining the operational plan for making an enveloping fire at the areas around Guam with the medium-to-long-range strategic ballistic rocket Hwasong-12,". The statement also said that the Korean People's Army (KPA) stands ready to stage an all-out armed conflict if Washington presses ahead with a preventive war against it.¹⁷

• Trump warns North Korea with Military Action

On August 8, 2017 U.S President Donald Trump warned North Korea that it continues to threaten America will be met with "fire and fury". Trumps warming came after a day North Korea issued a threat to retaliate and take "physical" action against the US for passing new sanctions. Trump said reporters that, "North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire

¹⁵ "N.K. condemns new U.N. sanctions, vows retaliation against U.S.", the Yonhap News, August 7, 2017, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/08/07/0401000000AEN20170807008953315.html (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

¹⁶ "N. Korea threatens 'physical' actions over new U.N. sanctions", The Yonhap News, August 8, 2017, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/08/08/04010000000AEN20170808000651315.html

¹⁷ "N. Korea threatens missile strike near Guam, warns of all-out war", The yonhap News, August 9, 2017, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/08/09/04010000000AEN20170809001054315.html (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

and fury like the world has never seen". ¹⁸ On August 11, in response to North Korea's threat to attach Guam, Trump tweeted "Military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely. Hopefully Kim Jong Un will find another path!". ¹⁹

• Japan's New Foreign Minister Taro Kono tells China, "learn how to behave as a big power."

On August 7, 2017 – Japan's new foreign minister, Taro Kono made a provocative statement during his first bilateral talk with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Manila, saying he wants Beijing to "learn how to behave as a big power." During the bilateral Wang said, ""Frankly speaking, we were disappointed to hear your comments" over issues surrounding the South China Sea in the East Asia Summit foreign ministers' meeting that was held earlier in the day. The Japanese and Chinese ministers met on the sidelines of a series of Association of Southeast Asian Nations-related gatherings. Kono replaced Fumio Kishida as the Foreign Minister on August 3 when by Prime Minister Abe reshuffled his cabinet. Kono is seen as a pro-China politician.²⁰

• Japan's New Defense Minister says SDF could shoot down N. Korea missile targeting Guam

On August 10, the New Japanese Defese Minister Itsunori Onodera said that Japan's Self-Defense Forces could intercept North Korean missiles targeting Guam. Onodera comment came in response to Pyongyang threat to strike the U.S. territory in the Pacific. The Minster told a Diet committee that such a missile launch by North Korea can be recognized as a condition enabling Japanese troops to exercise the right to collective self-defense, or coming to the aid of the United States and other allies under armed attack even if Japan itself is not attacked.²¹

https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/895970429734711298?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Etweet (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

¹⁸ "Trump says North Korea will be met with 'fire and fury' if it threatens U.S.", The Reuters, August 9, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-usa-trump-idUSKBN1AO28O (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

¹⁹ Trump, Twitter, August 11, 2017,

²⁰ "Kono urges China to learn 'how to behave as a big power", The Japan Times, August 8, 2017, http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/08/national/politics-diplomacy/kono-urges-china-learn-behave-big-power/ (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

²¹ "Japan could shoot down N. Korea missile targeting Guam: defense chief", Kyodo News, August 10, 2017, https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2017/08/58odaoa62bda-update1-japan-could-shoot-down-n-korea-missile-targeting-guam-defense-chief.html?phrase=north+korea&words=Korea,North,Korea%27s (Accessed on August 14, 2017)

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

• 8th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Ministerial Meeting

Foreign Ministers of Thailand, Myanmar and Mr VK Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs, MEA, attended the 8th Mekong-Ganga Ministerial Meeting in Manila. The foreign ministers of the MGC reviewed the cooperation and future direction of the MGC as well as adopted the 8th Joint Ministerial Statement. The foreign ministers thanked India for its active engagement with the sub-region and welcomed the theme, "Build Better Connectivity for Sustainable Development", as proposed by India. India also proposed to host the first connectivity summit in the last trimester of this year in India.²²

• Fifty Years of ASEAN: Achievements and Challenges

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsude speaking at the plenary session on ASEAN Community building stated that in the midst of doubts about multilateralism and regionalism, ASEAN has proven itself to be the motor of peace and regional stability. ASEA has succeeded in creating an ecosystem of peace, stability and prosperity in the region. The success of ASEAN has prevented open conflict, triggered economic development, and regional welfare that made ASEAN a growth engine for the region and the world. The foreign minister affirmed that ASEAN should also be successful in facing various challenges that exist as well as new challenges such as the geopolitical rivalry in the South China Sea. In this regard the FM emphasised the role of ASEAN in managing the situation by respecting the basic principles of international law and maintaining good relations with all parties.²³

• China-ASEAN Seek to Further Enhance Cooperation

The Foreign Ministers of ASEAN at the 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministerial Meeting agreed that the continued economic growth with China would be beneficial for ASEAN members and the block anticipates a higher level of strategic partnership with China through high-level dialogue and higher level of economic integration. They welcomed the coming into force the Protocol to Amend the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation, the establishment of which

²²"8th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Ministerial Meeting", *Ministry of Foreign affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand*, August 7, 2017, http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/news3/6886/80000-8th-Mekong-%E2%80%93-Ganga-Cooperation-Ministerial-Meeting.html, accessed on August 8, 2017.

²³ "FM: 50 years of ASEAN Proven as a Motor of Peace, Regional Stability", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia*, August 6, 2017, http://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/FM-Retno-50-Years-of-ASEAN-Has-Proven-Itself-as-a-Motor-of-Peace-and-Regional-Stability.aspx, accessed on August 8, 2017.

would help support the twin goals of a two-way trade and investment of US \$ 1 trillion and US \$ 150 billion respectively by 2020. Further, as 2018 marks the 18th anniversary of the China-ASEAN strategic partnership, the year is expected to be designated as the ASEAN-China year of innovation cooperation, and also formulate a 2030 vision for the strategic partnership which would become a blueprint to guide future relations.²⁴

• Inclusion of 'non-Militarisation and Self-Restrain' in the South China Sea incorporated into the ASEAN Joint Communiqué

The final version of the ASEAN communiqué emphasised the importance of nonmilitarisation and self-restrain in the South China Sea, after extensive discussions and concerns being voiced by some ASEAN members, about land reclamation and activities in the area. According to Foreign Secretary of Philippines, Alan Cayetano, the joint communiqué was very balanced as it reflected compromises that all sides had to make. The foreign secretary revealed that the Philippines had pushed to drop references to 'land reclamations" and "militarisation" in the South China Sea in the joint communiqué, even though insisted by Vietnam, as these were directed at Beijing and did not reflect the present position where the Chinese are not involved in reclamation activities in the South China Sea. Malaysia had also pushed to include the presence of military assets by both claimants and nonclaimants which was vetoed by the Philippines and Indonesia.²⁵ Vietnam has emerged as the most vocal opponent of China's claims in the waterway, where more than \$ 3 trillion in cargo passes every year. Vietnam had held out for language that noted concern about island-building and criticised militarisation in the South China Sea in the communiqué. China's foreign minister stated that china has not carried out reclamation in the South China Sea for two years. However, Vietnam based on satellite images showed that Beijing has been carrying out reclamation work. Tension between China and Vietnam has risen since June, when Vietnam infuriated China by drilling for oil and gas in an offshore block that Beijing disputes. Further, a schedule meeting between the foreign ministers of China and Vietnam was also cancelled, which was to be held on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit.26

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²⁴"China, ASEAN Eye broader cooperation", *Borneo Bulletin*, August 8, 2017, http://borneobulletin.com.bn/china-asean-eye-broader-cooperation/, accessed on August 8, 2017.

²⁵ "Joint Communiqué on South China Sea Dispute balanced: Philippines", *The Straits Times*, August 9, 2017, http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/joint-communique-on-south-china-sea-dispute-balanced-philippines, accessed on August 9, 2017.

²⁶ "China, Vietnam meeting cancelled amid S. China Sea tensions", *Bangkok Post*, August 8, 2017, http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asean/1302382/china-vietnam-meeting-cancelled-amid-s-china-seatensions, accessed on August 8, 2017.

US Secretary of State visit Thailand and Malaysia with focus on North Korea

Washington is reaching out to key actors in the region as a consequent of Pyongyang defiance to the UN Security Council Resolutions on disbanding its nuclear ballistic missile tests. Mr Tillerson first travelled to Thailand in order to meet PM Prayut Chan-o-Cha and the foreign minister, asking for more action on North Korea. According to UN international trade statistics database, Thailand exports US \$ 73.8 million worth of products to North Korea in 2015. However, Thailand's FM stated that trade with North Korea have dropped by 94 percent over the past year. The US Secretary of State is the senior most US official to visit Thailand in the aftermath of Thailand's military coup in 2014. This according to Paul Chambers a lecturer at Naresuan University indicates that the Trump's administration has been reactive to the changing equilibrium in the region, thus, reaffirming its continual engagement the region.²⁷ The US has also identified Malaysia as a key player in its efforts to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions, with the US Secretary of State pressing PM Najib Abdul Razak for intelligence -sharing and closer cooperation in cracking down on the regime's clandestine operations in the region. US intelligence-gathering has spotlighted Malaysia as a favoured location for North Korea, and the US is hoping to seal a formal arrangement to allow US-Malaysian agencies to share information, dismantle commercial operations and detain North Korea's proxies operating in Malaysia. Malaysia is keen to strengthen ties with the US and officials have noted that the PM and his deputy are likely to respond positively to the US proposal.²⁸

• The Korean Peninsula Crisis focus of the 24th ARF, and 7th EAS

The development in the Korean Peninsula also took centre stage at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting, where the members voiced their support for the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner while also calling for the exercise of self-restrain and underscore the importance of creating conditions conducive for dialogue to de-escalate tension. The ARF also called upon North Korean, as a participant of the ASEAN Regional Forum, to positively contribute to the realisation of lasting peace, stability, friendship, and prosperity of the region.²⁹ This was also reiterated by

²⁷"Tillerson visits Thailand with focus on ties and Pyongyang", *The Straits Times*, August 9, 2017, http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/tillerson-visits-thailand-with-focus-on-ties-and-pyongyang, accessed on August 9, 2017.

²⁸Leslie Lopez, "US to get Malaysia's help to rein in North Korea", *The Straits Times*, August 8, 2017, http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/us-to-get-malaysias-help-to-rein-in-n-korea, accessed on August 9, 2017.

²⁹ "ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting Statement on the Developments in the Korean Peninsula", *Ministry* of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, August 5, 2017,

Malaysia's foreign minister who during the East Asia Summit and the ARF meeting emphasised on three issues, namely, counter terrorism and violence extremism, South China Sea and situation in the Korean Peninsula.³⁰

North America

Canada

North Korea's threat to rain down missiles leaves Canada looking for an umbrella

A historical aversion to missile defence has left Canada unshielded, as North Korea and the United States rattle their sabres. In the short term, this may not matter much. In the long term, analysts say, Canada needs to get under the protective American umbrella. If, sometime in the next few years, North Korea becomes capable of launching nuclear-tipped ICBMs at the United States, Canada will have no say in the deliberations over how the NORAD missile defence system might respond to an attack, even if one or more missiles are headed, by accident or design, for Canada. If North America were subjected to an attack involving numerous missiles, one or more of which targeted Canada, there is no guarantee American military commanders would defend Canadian territory, absent a joint missile-defence agreement.³¹

• Canada had 2 meetings with North Korean officials this week

Canada's foreign affairs minister and the envoy who secured the release of an imprisoned Presbyterian minister have both held talks over the last few days with senior North Korean officials about the deteriorating international situation. Chrystia Freeland said on August 11, 2017 that she met with Ri Yong-ho, her counterpart from Pyongyang, during a meeting of Asian-Pacific foreign ministers in Manila. It was followed by a longer mid-week discussion in the North Korean capital between that country's foreign ministry officials and the head of the Canadian delegation sent to secure the release of Toronto Presbyterian minister Rev. Hyeon Soo Lim. The face-to-face meetings came at a time of extraordinary

http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/news3/6886/79957-ASEAN-Foreign-Ministers%E2%80%99-Meeting-Statement-on-the.html, accessed on August 10, 2017.

^{3° &}quot;18th ASEAN Plus Three Foreign Ministers' Meeting, 7th East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting and 24th ASEAN Regional Forum 7 August Manila, The Philippines", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia*, August 9, 2017, http://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/press-release/-/asset_publisher/FCko/content/press-release-:-18th-asean-plus-three-foreign-ministers%E2%80%99-meeting-7th-east-asia-summit-foreign-ministers%E2%80%99-meeting-and-24th-asean-regional-forum-7-august-2017-manila-the-philippines?redirect=%2Fweb%2Fguest%2Fpress-release, accessed on August 10, 2017.

³¹ John Ibbitson, "North Korea's threat to rain down missiles leaves Canada looking for an umbrella," https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/north-koreas-threat-to-rain-down-missiles-leaves-canada-looking-for-an-umbrella/article35973683/, Accessed on 14 August 2017.

tension between U.S. President Donald Trump's administration and the regime of Kim Jong-un, which has threatened to launch a missile strike on waters off the U.S. territory of Guam sometime in August 2017. Freeland made it clear Canada is standing firmly beside the United States and the threats were totally unacceptable.³²

• Round 1: Canada stakes out ground as historic NAFTA rewrite begins

After months of heated rhetoric and diplomatic groundwork, talks to overhaul the North American Free Trade Agreement will formally begin on August 19, 2017 with Canada pushing for more stringent labour and environmental standards in the deal. Canada's top diplomat, Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland, will travel to Washington on August 15, 2017 where the first round of formal negotiations is set to take place. While the U.S. has far greater issues with Mexico, Trump's aim to shred Chapter 19 of NAFTA, which includes provisions for a dispute resolution mechanism, could prove to be a flashpoint with Canada.³³

United States

• India, US tighten embrace as Trump works on South Asia policy

With VK Singh meeting US secretary of state Rex Tillerson in Manila on the sidelines of the ASEAN foreign ministers meeting, it caps a week of renewed engagement between India and the US. It comes at a time when the Trump administration is working on a South Asia policy to deal with one of the longest and most difficult wars in Afghanistan. Trump, said sources, is looking for a new approach because the current one is not going anywhere. According to reports, Trump complained to his military generals that the US was "not winning" in Afghanistan. The effort, therefore, is to look at new approaches, said sources familiar with the exercise. The new policy, which has not yet been articulated by the US government, differs most from the Obama iteration in that it might move away from a time-based effort.³⁴

• Top US military official arrives South Korea amid North Korea tension
The US' top military official has landed in South Korea ahead of talks with the
country's leader and US military amid rising tensions on the Korean peninsula.
The looming threat of a North Korean missile strike on the US territory of Guam,
and Pyongyang's increasing nuclear capabilities, have exacerbated tensions in the

region. North Korean military figures are putting the final touches on a plan to fire

http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/north-korea-canada-1.4244177, Accessed on 14 August 2017.

³² Murray Brewster, "Canada had 2 meetings with North Korean officials this week,"

³³ Kathleen Harris, "Round 1: Canada stakes out ground as historic NAFTA rewrite begins," http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/nafta-negotiations-freeland-washington-1.4241813, Accessed on 14 August 2017

³⁴ Indrani Bagchi, "India, US tighten embrace as Trump works on South Asia policy," http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-us-relationship-witnesses-renewed-level-of-engagement-at-asean-meet/articleshow/59942955.cms, Accessed on 08 August 2017.

four missiles into the waters around the US territory of Guam, to be presented to leader Kim Jong Un within days. Chinese President Xi Jinping and other world leaders have called for calm as both Pyongyang and Washington upped their saber-rattling rhetoric. On August 11, 2017, US President Donald Trump doubled down on his statement that he would unleash "fire and fury like the world has never seen" if Pyongyang continued its threats, saying in a tweet that "military solutions" were "locked and loaded" for use against North Korea.³⁵

• Trump's odd thank-you to Putin for expelling U.S. diplomats sparks anger among foreign service officers

President Trump now says he was being sarcastic, but his expression of gratitude to Russian President Vladimir Putin for cutting hundreds of U.S. diplomatic personnel was no laughing matter for many U.S. Foreign Service officers. Their anger and concern poured out on social media and elsewhere Friday, a day after Trump repeatedly thanked Putin for ordering the State Department to cut 755 diplomats and staff from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and three consulates, saying, "Now we have a smaller payroll." Although White House aides sought to downplay Trump's earlier comments, they were a stinging blow for many current and former State Department staff. Under Putin, American diplomats have been harassed, surveilled and even physically attacked in Moscow. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said he will respond to Moscow by Sept. 1, 2017, the deadline Putin set. The State Department has called Putin's order "a regrettable and uncalled-for act." 36

Mexico

• Mexico ruling party's reform strengthens president ahead of 2018 vote

A move by Mexico's ruling party to allow an outsider to run for president strengthens the hand of beleaguered leader Enrique Pena Nieto, granting him more power to pick his own candidate and opening a path for his finance minister, Jose Antonio Meade. Stained by graft, tepid growth and rising violence, the centrist PRI faces an uphill battle to win the election, and party figures concede the new rules may reflect its best chance of retaining the presidency. Experts say the rule change represents a deft manoeuvre by the traditionalist Pena Nieto, furnishing him with a better cast of potential candidates, while allowing him to keep PRI presidential hopefuls on their toes.³⁷

35 James Griffiths and Joshua Berlinger, "Top US military official arrives South Korea amid North Korea tension," http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/13/asia/north-korea-guam-trump/index.html,Accessed on 14 August 2017.

³⁶ Tracy Wilkinson, "Trump's odd thank-you to Putin for expelling U.S. diplomats sparks anger among foreign service officers," http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-fg-trump-thanks-russia-20170811-story.html, Accessed on 14 August 2017.

³⁷ Gabriel Stargardter, "Mexico ruling party's reform strengthens president ahead of 2018 vote," https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics-analysis-idUSKBN1AR04T, Accessed on 14 August 2017.

• Latin America condemns Donald Trump's military intervention threat to Venezuela

Latin American countries have slammed Donald Trump's threat of military intervention to end Venezuela's political crisis. Mr Trump said he was considering various measures to tackle Venezuela "including a possible military option if necessary". Venezuela's defence minister Vladimir Padrino said Mr Trump's comments were "an act of craziness". Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Brazil have condemned the president's comments. Mexico foreign minister Luis Videgaray wrote on Twitter. "The crisis in Venezuela can't be resolved through military actions, internally or externally." Many Latin countries have bitter memories of past military interventions in the region, including the 1989 invasion of Panama to topple leader Manuel Noriega. US Vice President Mike Pence is currently touring Latin America with the aim of co-ordinating regional diplomatic action to end the crisis in Caracas.³⁸

Latin American and Caribbean

Brazil

• Brazil's Temer Tries to Bar Top Prosecutor from Investigations

Lawyers for Brazil's President, Michel Temer, asked on August 8, 2017 for Supreme Court (STF) to bar the country's top prosecutor, Rodrigo Janot, from taking part in any investigation related to the president. According to Temer's defense is 'bias in his actions against the president'. President Temer was relieved when the Chamber of Deputies rejected charges against him brought on by Rodrigo Janot. In July 2017, Janot charged President Michel Temer with the crime of passive corruption. The indictment was based on investigations of recordings made by former JBS's CEO Joesley Batista during a late-night meeting with the president in March 2017. The charges were submitted by Janot to the Chamber of Deputies so the Lower House could decide whether or not to continue the investigation. The charges were rejected on August 2, 2017 by Chamber representatives but according to local media, Janot had plans to submit other charges against the President before he stepped down, in September 2017. Janot has also been criticized by the president of

³⁸ ----, "Latin America condemns Donald Trump's military intervention threat to Venezuela," http://news.sky.com/story/latin-america-condemns-donald-trumps-military-intervention-threat-to-venezuela-10986752, Accessed on 14 August 2017.

the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and one of the Justices at the Supreme Court, Gilmar Mendes.³⁹

Venezuela

• Trump Threatens Venezuela with U.S. 'Military Option'

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened military intervention in Venezuela, a surprise escalation in Washington's response to the South American nation's political crisis. On August 11, 2017, President Trump told reporters that he had "many options" for responding to the Venezuelan crisis including a possible military option if necessary. The Pentagon, however, has reportedly not been directed on any such plans. Venezuela has appeared to slide toward a more volatile stage of unrest in recent days, with anti-government forces looting weapons from a military base after the installation of an all-powerful new legislative body. President Trump called Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro a "dictator" and blamed him for the humanitarian situation in the country. Venezuela's defense minister, Vladimir Padrilo, denounced Trump's talk of a possible military intervention, labeling it "an act of craziness," speaking to state TV on August 11, 2017. Ernesto Villegas, Venezuela's Communications Minister, also called Trump's statement "an unprecedented threat to national sovereignty". 40

On August 9, 2017, the U.S. imposed sanctions on eight Venezuelan officials, including President Nicolas Maduro and Adan Coromoto Chavez Frias, the brother of former President Hugo Chavez. The sanctions were imposed due to Constituent Assembly elections on July 30, 2017 in Venezuela, which the US called "illegitimate." The US Treasury Department on August 9, 2017 said the constituent assembly was elected "through an undemocratic process instigated by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government to subvert the will of the Venezuelan people." The sanctions will freeze U.S. assets of the officials targeted, ban them from travel to the United States and prohibit Americans from doing business with them. According to Jorge Arreaza, Venezuela's Foreign Minister, Venezuela rejects this act of aggression by the government of Washington, and we do not recognize any sanction against the people of Venezuela.⁴¹

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³⁹ Lise Alves, "Brazil's Temer Tries to Bar Top Prosecutor from Investigations," August 9, 2017, http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/rio-politics/brazils-temer-tries-to-bar-top-prosecutor-from-investigations/, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

⁴⁰ "Trump Threatens Venezuela with US Military Option; Caracas Calls it Crazy," August 12, 2017, http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/08/12/trump-threatens-venezuela-with-u-s-military-option-caracas-calls-it-crazy/, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

⁴¹ "US Imposes More Sanctions Against Venezuela Including Hugo Chavez's Brother," August 10, 2017, http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/08/10/u-s-imposes-more-sanctions-against-venezuela-including-hugo-chavezs-brother/, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

• America's Foreign Ministers Meet in Peru to Reject Maduro's Illegal Constituent Assembly in Venezuela

On August 8, 2017, thirteen foreign ministers from the Americas met in Lima, Peru, in order to discuss Venezuela's social and political crisis. The result was a signed declaration in which the representatives declare that Nicolás Maduro's constituent assembly is illegal and illegitimate, as are all decisions that result from it. The meeting, which was summoned by the government of Peru, assembled the foreign ministers of: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru. They all signed a document that condemned the rupture of Venezuela's "democratic order." The group of nations also declared that they would not recognize Maduro's National Constituent Assembly due to its illegitimate character. However, the twelve governments do recognize and support Venezuela's National Assembly or parliament, which was elected on December 6, 2015. According to the declaration, the National Assembly enjoys full democratic legitimacy.

The foreign ministers also confirmed their support for Venezuela's Attorney General Luisa Ortega Díaz, who was recently removed from her post by means of the fraudulent constituent assembly held on July 30, 2017. The group of nations also condemned the Maduro regime's use of repression, political violence, persecution, and abuse of political prisoners. They also approved a decision by MERCOSUR, a regional trading block, to suspend Venezuela for violating the institution's democratic charter. The group of foreign ministers stated that it will meet again in September 2017 to discuss Venezuela, Maduro's authoritarian power grab, and the human rights violations which his regime commits regularly. They added that another meeting concerning the Venezuelan crisis is possible within the framework of the United Nations' General Assembly in New York, where wider support for Venezuelan democracy can be gathered potentially.⁴²

• Venezuela and China Strengthen Economic Ties

Venezuela and China evaluated new financial schemes during a recent meeting of the Bilateral High-Level Commission that met in this city to strengthen relations between both nations. The South American nation in the meeting aims its efforts to the development of its new diversified productive model, with the support of the Asian giant. To achieve that purpose, 50 billion dollars have been invested in over 650 strategic projects, said Venezuelan vice-president of Planning, Ricardo Menendez. The high official explained they work on five fundamental lines, being

⁴² "America's Foreign Ministers Meet in Peru to Reject Maduro's Illegal Constituent Assembly in Venezuela," August 9, 2017, http://todayvenezuela.com/2017/08/09/americas-foreign-ministers-meet-in-peru-to-reject-maduros-illegal-constituent-assembly-in-venezuela/, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

the first the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) as a space to create opportunities that contribute to economic development. The second line of action is the expansion of productive capacities in logistics and distribution. An example of this is to reduce to zero the housing deficit through the Great Missioon Housing Venezuela (Gmvv in Spanish).

The third line is productive linking aimed at placing the surplus production capacities of China on Venezuelan soil, in areas such as iron-steel, aluminum, glass, cement, petrochemical, gas, pharmaceutical and agriculture and food sectors. According to Menendez, the Mixed Commission will concentrate in the mining sector, creation of enterprises for activities such as nickel and coal, visit to the Araya port of deep waters for the storage of oil and review wells in Lake Maracaibo, to increase their production capacity adding 60 thousand barrels per day of crude. It is also projected to install a refinery in Nanjing, which will process 400 thousand barrels per day of Venezuelan crude.⁴³

Russia

• Russia and Its Upcoming Elections

On August 11, 2017, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at a meeting with participants of the forum "Territory of Meanings on the Klyazma" stated that Moscow will not allow Washington's interference in the elections held in Russia. A month later, on September 10, 2017, a single voting day will be held in Russia. A total of 5.8 thousand regional and municipal elections will take place across the country. In another six months, the presidential elections will be held.⁴⁴

Russia and North Korea

On August 11, 2017 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at a meeting with participants of the forum "Territory of Meanings on the Klyazma" stated that the risk of a military conflict between the U.S. and North Korea is "very high." He said that Russia is strongly worried about escalating rhetoric coming from Pyongyang and Washington. He added that "when it comes close to fight, the one who is stronger and wiser should be the first to step back from the brink." Asked how Moscow would act in case of a military conflict between the U.S. and the North, Lavrov answered it would do everything it could to prevent the worst-case

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⁴³ "Venezuela and China Strengthen Economic Ties in Caracas Meeting," August 11, 2017, http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/08/11/venezuela-and-china-strengthen-economic-ties-in-caracas-meeting/, August 14, 2017.

⁴⁴"Lavrov warned the US against interference in the elections in Russia", *TASS*, August 11, 2017. http://tass.ru/politika/4477379?utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=smm_social_shar e, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

scenario. Lavrov said Russia doesn't accept the North's nuclear weapons bid and pointed at a proposal by China and Russia under which Pyongyang would freeze its nuclear and missile tests while the U.S. and South Korea would halt their military drills.⁴⁵

The official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Maria Zakharova in an interview with the program "Sunday Evening" on the TV channel "Russia 1" on August 13, 2017 said that risk of a forceful solution of the crisis around the DPRK is very high. "If there really is a use of a force scenario and if everything really goes the way the representatives of the establishment in Washington are frightening, the situation will be simply disastrous," Zakharova said. Fukushima. According to her, the United States is not aware of the consequences of a potential power conflict and the fact that "all countries in the region and not just the region will be affected."⁴⁶

• Russia and Venezuela

On 10 August, 2017, the Russian Foreign Ministry released a statement denouncing the imposition of sanctions on Venezuela by the US on allies of authoritarian Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, as the South American country descends into a constitutional crisis. The statement read "We do not think that actions of this sort contribute anything constructive." "The current determining reality is the formation of a new supreme national body, the National Constituent Assembly, following the July 30 elections, and its practical launch, which lay the foundations for a new institutional framework of the country's internal political life, and which we believe are creating opportunities for Venezuela to move towards stabilization," the Russian Foreign Ministry said. Russia's endorsement coincided with Cuban dictator Raul Castro applauding Maduro in an open letter that also denounced American sanctions. Russia supports the referendum by saying that it is "a starting point" for a resolution of the political crisis.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, relationship between Russia and Cuba has been warming. Cuba has been quietly reaching out to Russia over the last few weeks. Castro's team has huddled twice with senior Russian officials since the last week of July 2017. Specifically, Castro's foreign ministry sent the "head of the United States division," Josefina Vidal, to Moscow for a meeting with deputy foreign minister Sergey Ryabkov in July 26, 2017. Ryabkov met with

⁴⁵"Russia and Germany weigh in on North Korea war rhetoric", *PBS Newshour*, August 11, 2017. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/russia-germany-weigh-in-on-north-korea-war-rhetoric/ Accessed on August 14, 2017.

⁴⁶"Zakharova: situation with North Korea is close to potential power conflict", *TASS*, August 13, 2017. http://tass.ru/politika/4479344 Accessed on August 14, 2017.

Joel Gehrke, "Russia joins Cuba to back Maduro's power grab in Venezuela", Washington Examiner, August 11, 2017. http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/russia-joins-cuba-to-back-maduros-power-grab-in-venezuela/article/2631275, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

the Cuban ambassador to Russia. Few details of the meetings are available. Cuba's foreign ministry did not publish a summary of the discussions, while the Russians⁴⁸ provided only the briefest of readouts.⁴⁹

Russia and India

Russia and India has decided to hold a mega war game "Indra" in October (19-29 October) involving their armies, navies and the air forces for the first time to further ramp up military ties. The exercise will primarily focus on achieving coordination between forces of the two countries in a tri- services integrated theatre command scenario. It will be for the first time India will participate in a tri-services exercise with a foreign country with such a large scale participation by the Navy, the Army and the Air Force. The exercise will take place in three locations in Russia including in mountainous Vladivostok region.⁵⁰

On defence ties between Russia and India, Sergei Chemezov, the CEO of the Rostec State Corporation during the first week of August said that Russia will always be India's strategic partner despite New Delhi's growing ties with countries like the US, France and Israel as there are certain defence products and technology that "no one else will give" except Moscow. He said that cooperation with India will certainly continue, regardless of whether India cooperates only with Russia or also with Israel, France, the US or other countries. "We have our own niche; these countries have their own directions for cooperation. Therefore, this does not mean that if India will work with some other countries, cooperation with Russia will cease. No," Chemezov told a select group of reporters on the sidelines of Russia's premier air show MAKS 2017 held in Russia.⁵¹

• Russia and Ukraine

The leader of Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region, Aleksandr Zakharchenko, in a statement on August 9, 2017 said that his plan to

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⁴⁸During the meeting, the officials noted the steady development of friendly relations between Russia and Cuba. The parties also exchanged views on current issues on the international agenda. "Press release on Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov's meeting with Head of the Cuban Foreign Ministry's US Division Josefina Vidal", *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, July 26, 2017. http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2824181, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

Joel Gehrke, "Castro huddles with Russia as US-Cuba relationship crumbles", *Washington Examiner*, August 11, 2017. http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/castro-huddles-with-russia-as-us-cuba-relationship-crumbles/article/2631231, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

⁵⁰"India, Russia to hold mega war games in October", *Economic Times*, August 13, 2017. http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-russia-to-hold-mega-war-games-in-october/articleshow/60043990.cms, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

⁵¹"Indo-Russia relations strong despite India's growing ties with US, Israel", *Economic Times*, August 1, 2017. http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indo-russia-relations-strong-despite-indias-growing-ties-with-us-israel/articleshow/59859409.cms, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

create a country called Little Russia has failed. He said that the name Little Russia -- Malorossia in Russian-- "was rejected by many." Zakharchenko had announced the initiative on July 18, 2017 suggesting that Malorossia would encompass all of Ukraine and saying Donetsk would be its capital. It was met with derision and criticism in Kyiv and the West, and did not receive the Kremlin's support. In the new statement, Zakharchenko claimed that the idea of re-establishing Ukraine with a less powerful central government and a new name "has won a broad support," but gave no evidence of that.⁵²

• Russia and the US

On August 11, the US President Donald Trump thanked Russian President Vladimir Putin for ordering the United States to slash its diplomatic staff in Russia. Trump said "there's no real reason for them to go back" and "we're going to save a lot of money," in response to Putin's Cold War-style move, differing from the reactions of other presidents in similar circumstances in the past.⁵³

In a survey of 2,020 people carried out in July 2017 by GfK Custom Research and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that majority of Americans support U.S. troops backing the Baltics if Russia ever attacked them. The support has increased by 8 percent compared with three years ago. The survey also found broad support for sanctions on Russia, with 41 percent in favour of keeping sanctions imposed mostly over events in Ukraine and 38 percent in favour of making sanctions harsher. 44 per cent of the Americans see Russian influence in elections as a critical threat.⁵⁴

Russia and Poland

In a statement on August 9, a **special new commission investigating the** wreckage of a Polish plane that crashed in 2010 said that traces of explosives have been found. An earlier report into the crash under Poland's previous government said the wing smashed into a birch tree close to the runway at the Smolensk military airport, causing the plane to crash. The statement said that "Damage to the left wing of the TU 154M was not started by colliding with the birch tree ... The wing's destruction started before the birch tree... [and] much damage to the left

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⁵² "Russia-Backed Separatist Leader Says 'Little Russia' A Bust", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, August 10, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-donetsk-zakharchenko-dumps-malorossia/28669230.html, Accessed on August 14, 2017.

⁵³ "Trump thanks Putin for slashing U.S. diplomatic staff", *Reuters*, August 11, 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-russia-diplomats-idUSKBN1AQ2IW Accessed on August 14, 2017. for Damien Sharkov, "War in Europe: Most Americans Support Sending Troops to Baltics if Russia Attacks", *Newsweek*, August 9, 2017. http://www.newsweek.com/us-military-europe-most-americans-want-troops-baltics-if-russia-attacked-648458 Accessed on August 14, 2017.

wing of the TU 154M plane carry traces of an explosion." The 2010 crash killed Polish President Lech Kaczyński, his wife, and 94 others; many of them top government and military officials. It added that Russian air traffic controllers deliberately misled Polish pilots about their location as they approached the runway of the Smolensk military airport in western Russia on 10 April 2010.⁵⁵

• Russia, Belarus and Georgia

Former leader of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili spoke to told Baltic news agency BNS on August 9 ahead of the drill, called Zapad, and scheduled for September between Russia and Belarus that Russia's leadership is angling to annex its closest western neighbour, Belarus, during upcoming military drills. Lithuania, a NATO ally that borders with Russia, has expressed concern that the drill indicates a wider threat to the alliance, constituting a "simulated" attack. NATO has demanded that Russia allows for more transparency in the drill, nominally set to involve around 12,000 troops. Belarus's President Alexander Lukashenko has dismissed concerns that Zapad is anything but a routine defense drill. Although strongly reliant on Russia in most regards, the Belarusian government has shown some signs of disagreement with its bigger partner in what the two countries symbolically call "the Union State." Despite a Kremlin push to deploy an airbase in Belarus, Minsk has resisted that initiative. So

On August 8, 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia and reiterated Russia's support for the separatists. The Georgian government condemned the August 8 visit, which coincided with the ninth anniversary of the five-day Russia-Georgia war, as a "cynical action." "The most important thing is that we have entirely special relations with Abkhazia," Putin said as he met with the region's separatist leader Raul Khadzhimba in the Black Sea resort of Pitsunda. Putin also said that the two sides need to find ways to develop Abkhazia's economy to create jobs. After the talks, the Russian president said that he considers it possible to soon ease controls and customs procedures on the border with Abkhazia to encourage travel and facilitate trade. Meanwhile, the Georgian Foreign Ministry said Putin's visit to Abkhazia "serves for legitimization of forceful change of borders of the sovereign state through military aggression, ethnic cleansing, and occupation." A NATO spokesman said that Putin's trip was "detrimental to international efforts to find a peaceful and negotiated settlement."

⁵⁵"'Traces of explosion' found on Smolensk plane", *The News (Poland)*, August 9, 2017. http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/320135,Traces-of-explosion-found-on-Smolensk-plane Accessed on August 14, 2017.

⁵⁶Damien Sharkov, "Russia Plans to Annex Belarus in Military Drill, says Georgia's ex-President", *Newsweek*, August 9, 2017. http://www.newsweek.com/russia-plans-take-belarus-military-drill-says-georgias-ex-president-648406 Accessed on August 14, 2017.

During a visit to Tbilisi last week, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence reaffirmed Washington's support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and denounced Russia's "aggression" and "occupation" of Georgian territory.⁵⁷

South Asia

Afghanistan

• Nicholson Refuses Private Offer to Boost Afghan Air Force

Erik Prince, the former CEO of the private military company, Blackwater, has offered to step up the Afghan air war with a private air force capable of intelligence collection and close-air support, the Military Times reported. According to a recent proposal submitted to the Afghan government, a senior Afghan military official said that Prince has submitted a business proposal offering a "turn-key composite air wing" to help the fledgling Afghan air force in its fight against the Taliban and other militant groups. The development comes as the White House is considering a plan to draw down the US involvement in Afghanistan and replace the ensuing power vacuum with contractors.⁵⁸

• Taliban Reacts as Saudi Envoy Brands the Group A Terrorist Organization The Taliban group in Afghanistan reacted at the remarks of the Saudi Arabia envoy after he called the group a terrorist organization. A spokesman for the group Zabiullah Mujahid in a statement said the Kingdom of Saudi Arabai should play its role to resolve the ongoing conflict in the country, claiming that Afghanistan has been occupied by the foreigners. Mujahid also dismissed the remarks by the Saudi envoy regarding the group's political office in Qatar, saying that office has been established with an aim to seek ways for the peace talks and reconciliation.⁵⁹

• U.S. Spent \$76B on Weapons and Equipment for Afghan Security Forces The U.S. Department of Defense funded more than \$76 billion dollars of weapons, communication devices, and other security equipment to the Afghan security forces since 2002, according to a new report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the U.S. has allocated

⁵⁷ "Putin Visits Abkhazia On Anniversary Of Russia-Georgia War", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, August 9, 2017. https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-georgia-abkhazia/28665867.html Accessed on August 14, 2017.

⁵⁸ "Nicholson Refuses Private Offer to Boost Afghan Air Force", *Tolo News*, August 7, 2017, http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/nicholson-refuses-private-offer-boost-afghan-air-force (accessed on August 14, 2017)

⁵⁹ "Taliban Reacts as Saudi Envoy Brands Calls the Group A Terrorist Organization", *Khaama Press*, August 8, 2017, http://www.khaama.com/taliban-reacts-as-saudi-envoy-brands-calls-the-group-a-terrorist-organization-03311 (accessed on August 14, 2017)

funding for nearly 600,000 weapons to be put in the hands of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), according to Defense Department data. Nearly 81 per cent of these weapons were rifles and pistols. The firepower funding also included more than 25,000 grenade launchers and almost 10,000 rocket-propelled weapons used by the Afghan Border Police. ⁶⁰

• Failure in Afghanistan Means Strengthening Terrorists in West

NATO has to win the war against the insurgents in Afghanistan, the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan (RS) said on Saturday (August 12, 2017) at a gathering in Kabul held to mark the sacrifices of by Afghan and foreign soldiers. The commander of the U.S and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, said failure in Afghanistan will embolden extremist groups in the West. Nicholson said they should and will defeat the insurgents to safeguard their own homeland.⁶¹

• Ghani Calls Meeting Amid Reports of Delay in Afghanistan-India Air Corridor Flights

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani chaired a meeting amid reports the newly-launched Afghanistan-India air corridor initiative facing delays in flights. The Office of the President, ARG Palace, said the deputy chief of the chamber of commerce and industries Khan Jan Alokozay briefed the meeting regarding the issues being faced to execute more flights as part of the initiative. Calling the initial flights between the two countries as successful, Alokozay said changes in flight schedules have started to have bad affect on fresh fruits waiting for export. 62

Bangladesh

• Cabinet calls 16th amendment verdict 'objectionable', 'fishy'63

The cabinet has expressed anger and discontent over chief justice Surendra Kumar Sinha's observations in the 16th amendment verdict, terming these as

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⁶⁰ "U.S. Spent \$76B on Weapons and Equipment for Afghan Security Forces", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 12, 2017, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=18833 (accessed on August 14, 2017)

⁶¹ Gullabuddin Ghubar, "Failure In Afghanistan Means Strengthening Terrorists In West", *Tolo News*, August 12, 2017, http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/failure-afghanistan-means-strengthening-terrorists-west-rs (accessed on August 14, 2017)

⁶² "Ghani Calls Meeting Amid Reports of Delay in Afghanistan-India Air Corridor Flights", *Khaama Press*, August 13, 2017, http://www.khaama.com/ghani-calls-meeting-amid-reports-of-delay-in-afghanistan-india-air-corridor-flights-03351 (accessed on August 14, 2017)

⁶³ "Cabinet calls 16th amendment verdict 'objectionable', 'fishy', *Prothom Alo,* August 8, 2017, http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/155747/Cabinet-calls-16th-amendment-verdict (accessed on August 8, 2017)

'objectionable' and 'fishy'. Several ministers took part in an unscheduled discussion on the 16th amendment verdict in a cabinet meeting on Monday (August 7) and expressed their anger, saying the CJ's observations might be motivated.

Sushma Swaraj to visit Bangladesh in September⁶⁴

Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj will visit Dhaka in the first half of September to attend the fourth Bangladesh-India Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting. Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Harsh Vardhan Shringla informed Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque in a meeting held at the Foreign Ministry in Dhaka on August 7, 2017. However, the exact date of the visit is yet to be finalised.

To BNP, it's Magna Carta⁶⁵

The BNP yesterday blasted former chief justice ABM Khairul Haque for his comments on the 16th constitutional amendment verdict and Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha. "Former chief justice and now Law Commission Chairman Justice Khairul Haque spat venom [at the verdict] even before the government or the Awami League gave any formal reaction.... The comments he made sitting in Law Commission on the verdict and the chief justice are not only indecent, but also tantamount to contempt of court," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir. Terming the verdict historic, Fakhrul said it seemed to be a "Magna Carta" given the context of the prevailing political and social conditions in the country.

• JMB regional coordinator held⁶⁶

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested the regional coordinator of Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) from Chuadanga village of Jhenidah district on August 12, 2017. Tipped off, a team of RAB-6 conducted separate drives in Chuadanga BSCIC area around 12:45 am and arrested Limon Hossian, 22, also an accused in a case filed after seizure of explosives from the same area in May.

• Govt exerting pressure on CJ⁶⁷

⁶⁴ "Sushma Swaraj to visit Bangladesh in September, *Dhaka Tribune*, August 9, 2917, http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2017/08/09/sushma-swaraj-visit-bangladesh-september/ (accessed on August 9, 2017)

⁶⁵ "To BNP, it's Magna Carta," *Daily Star*, August 11, 2017, http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/bnp-its-magna-carta-1446919 (accessed on August 11, 2017)

⁶⁶ "JMB regional coordinator held in Jhenidah," *The Independent,* August 13, 2017,

http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/109192 (accessed on August 13, 2017)

⁶⁷ "Govt exerting pressure on CJ, alleges BNP, *The Independent*, August 14, 2017, http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/109323 (accessed on August 14, 2017)

BNP yesterday alleged that the government is trying to mount pressure on Chief Justice SK Sinha to change the Supreme Court verdict that annulled the 16th amendment to the constitution. "You (AL leaders) are creating pressure on the Chief Justice to change the verdict by force. You're openly asking him to change the verdict," said BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

नेपाल

प्रधानमंत्री देउबा 23 अगस्त को भारत की यात्रा करेंगे:

नेपाल के प्रधानमंत्री शेर बहादुर देउबा भारत के प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के आमंत्रण पर 23 अगस्त को भारत की पांच दिवसीय यात्रा करेंगे. सूत्रों के अनुसार दोनों देशों के अधिकारी इस यात्रा के एजेंडे और अंतिम तैयारी में जुटे हुए है. ऐसा माना जा रहा है कि प्रधानमंत्री देउबा इस यात्रा में अपने पिछले समझौतों जो कि 1996, 2002 और 2004 में हुए थे, उनके लागुकरण पर ही बात करेंगे. नेपाली अधिकारीयों ने कहा कि इस यात्रा के दो मुख्य एजेंडे रहेंगे- पहला पिछले करारों का क्रियान्वयन और भारत द्वारा नेपाल के प्रोजेक्टों को मिलने वाली मद का आंकलन करना.

भारत की विदेश मंत्री नेपाल में बिम्सटेक बैठक में शिरकत करेंगी:

प्रधानमंत्री देउबा की भारत यात्रा से पहले 10 अगस्त को भारत की विदेश मंत्री सुषमा स्वराज नेपाल में बिम्सटेक की बैठक में भाग लेंगी. स्वराज नेपाल के राष्ट्रपति और प्रधानमंत्री के अतिरिक्त अन्य राजनीतिक दलों के नेताओं से भी बैठक करेंगी

नेपाल भारत-चीन विवाद पर किसी का पक्ष नहीं लेगा:

विदेश मंत्री कृष्णा बहादुर महारा ने भारत और चीन के मध्य दोक्लम मुद्दे पर चल रही तनातनी में नेपाल को इससे दूर रहने की बात कही है. उन्होंने कहा कि भारत और चीन के साथ हमारी सीमाओं की नीति बिलकुल स्पष्ट है. नेपाल ने पहली बार दो माह से भारत और चीन के मध्य दोक्लम मुद्दे पर अपनी बात रखी है.

राजपा ने चुनाव का बहिष्कार का फैसला कियाः

राष्ट्रीय जनता पार्टी -नेपाल ने 18 सितम्बर को प्रांत 2 में होने वाले स्थानीय चुनाव में भाग न लेने की बात कही हैं. पार्टी प्रवक्ता मनीष कुमार सुमन ने कहा कि जब तक संविधान संशोधन बिल पास नहीं हो जाता तब तक हम चुनाव में भाग नहीं लेंगे. पार्टी के प्रवक्ता मनीष कुमार सुमन ने कहा कि यदि सरकार ने एक सप्ताह के अन्दर हमारी मांगे नहीं मानी तो तीसरे चरण के चुनाव को बाधित करने के लिए हम आन्दोलन करेंगे.

Indian Ocean Region

• India Prepared a Preliminary Design for Manned Submersible

The scientists of Earth System Science Organisation (ESSO) and National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) has prepared a preliminary design for the country's first manned submersible that can be able to take three member crew about six kilometres deep into the Ocean to explore deep seabed mineral resources. There is a plan to develop the manned submersible in next five years at a cost of Rs. 500 crore. With the development of this manned submersible vehicle, India will join an elite group of nations which have already developed manned submersible. To ensure the success of said plan, scientists are looking forward to construct "a similar looking spherical submersible in the next three years and send people to 500 metre deep into the Indian Ocean."

• Prime Minister Narendra Modi Hails India- Seychelles Partnership in the Indian Ocean

During the meeting with a Seychelles parliamentary delegation in New Delhi on August 10, 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the "strong and vibrant ties" between India and Seychelles.⁷² The Seychelles parliamentary delegation was on an official visit to India at the invitation of Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan.⁷³ The delegation was led by, Patrick Pillay, Speaker of Seychelles National Assembly. Patrick Pillay said that India's assistance is critical for Seychelles security.⁷⁴ Underlining the importance of India- Seychelles defence cooperation, Patrick Pillay said that India's assistance to Seychelles is "absolutely immeasurable".⁷⁵

• Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Search-and-Rescue Naval Drill

The Indian Navy and Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) will participate in IONS inaugural maritime search and rescue operation in the Indian

⁶⁸ Studying the sea: India prepares to dive deep with manned craft, August 05, 2017, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/india-prepares-to-dive-deep-with-manned-craft/articleshow/59921719.cms (accessed on August 14, 2017).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Modi hails India-Seychelles partnership in Indian Ocean, August 10, 2017, http://www.india.com/news/agencies/modi-hails-india-seychelles-partnership-in-indian-ocean-2392233/ (accessed on August 14, 2017).

⁷³ Ihid

⁷⁴ India's assistance to Seychelles absolutely immeasurable', August 10, 2017, http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/aug/10/indias-assistance-to-seychelles-absolutely-immeasurable-1641312.html (accessed on August 14, 2017).
⁷⁵ Ibid.

Ocean.⁷⁶ The exercise, scheduled for November 2017, will also involve other participating navies.⁷⁷ This inaugural IONS search and Rescue operation has to be chaired by Bangladesh.⁷⁸

• IORA Special Capacity Building Programme for Yemen and Somalia

To boost the employment generation and poverty alleviation programmes, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) organised a Special Capacity Building Programme for Somalia and Yemen.⁷⁹ The programme was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Abu Dhabi on 13-14 August 2017.⁸⁰ The programme was aimed to provide training on Cooperative Banking and Artisanal Fisheries.⁸¹ The development of fisheries sector can contribute to food security, job creation, poverty alleviation in Yemen and Somalia.⁸²

West Asia

Saudi Arabia and GCC

• Qatar Waives Visa for 80 Countries

On 9 August 2017, Qatar's Ministry of Interior (MoI), Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) and Qatar Airways announced that Doha will allow visa-free entry for citizens of 80 countries.83 These 80 countries include GCC and Schengen countries, as well as UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India, etc. Visitors of these countries will no longer need to apply or pay for a visa; instead, a multi-entry waiver will be issued free-of-charge at the port of entry, upon presentation of a valid passport with a minimum validity of six months and a confirmed onward or return ticket.⁸⁴ The waiver period varies from 30 to 180 days depending on the visitor's nationality The waiver period is extendable. Visitors

⁷⁶ Indian, Chinese Navies To Participate in Search-and-Rescue Naval Drill, August 14, 2017, http://thediplomat.com/2017/08/indian-chinese-navies-to-participate-in-search-and-rescue-naval-drill/ (accessed on August 14, 2017).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ IORA Somalia and Yemen Development Programme (SYDP) on Banking & Artisanal Fisheries Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 13-14 August 2017, IORA Press Release, http://www.iora.net/sydp-uae-13-14-august-2017.aspx (accessed on 14 August 2017).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

 $^{^{83}\} https://www.qatarairways.com/en/press-releases/2017/Aug/qatar-waives-entry-visa-requirements-for--citizens-of-80-countri.html$

⁸⁴ Ibid.

need to apply 48 hours before their visit and get Electronic Travel Authorisation. . Last month, Qatar has launched e-visa platform (www.qatarvisaservice.com).

Visa waiver is a critical component of promoting tourism in Qatar. It is an important pillar of diversification of Qatari economy. Qatar's Tourism Minister says, "it's a new journey of Qatar's vision 2030", and 'places Qatar among the most free country in the world".

However, Qatar's step of waive visa has been interpreted variously, especially under the current situation. In the light of the sanctions imposed by four Arab countries, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt, known as Anti-Terrorist Quartet (ATQ), Qatar's move is considered as a bold policy to defy the allegations made by the ATQ. Although Qatar has refuted both the charges that it has neither funded any terrorist organizations nor developed relations with Iran, the ATQ still maintains its stand.

Another possible reason of visa-free entry policy of Qatar is the FIFA World Cup, which the country is hosting in 2022. Doha perhaps wants people to visit Qatar, which help in dispelling the allegations of labour abuse and its incapacity to handle the event.

With this policy, Qatar also perhaps wants to improve its relations with the countries covered under the scheme by showcasing them that it is the most open, transparent and progressive country in the Middle East.

An important dimension of visa-free entry revolves around the Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030, launched in November 2014. The Strategy aims to host 7-9 million tourists by 2030 from 2.346 million in 201285 and help diversify the economy and generate alternative sources of income in a sustainable manner.86 Besides, it also aims to generating employment through tourism. Tourism contributes around 2.6 per cent to Qatar's GDP, but looking at its potential, Doha wants to increase it up to 5.1 per cent 2030, and also plans to invest around US\$ 45 billion and generate jobs around 1,27,900.87

Overall, these objectives seem to drive Qatar towards freeing the visa requirements of 80 countries. Moreover, it is also possible to believe that Qatar has shown determination in carrying forward its independent foreign policy. Last week, Doha sent a large delegation to Iran to attend the oath-taking ceremony of President Hassan Rouhani. It proves Qatar's independence against the annoyance of big Arab countries, including the ATQ, which did not send any delegation to Iran for attending Hassan Rouhani's swearing in ceremony.

⁸⁵ https://www.visitgatar.qa/corporate/planning/strategy-2030

⁸⁶ http://www.gulf-times.com/story/382486/Strategy-to-make-Qatar-top-spot-for-tourism

⁸⁷ http://archive.qatar-tribune.com/viewnews.aspx?n=EEB17AC2-014A-4BE9-9758-A07D141CA263&d=20140225

International Economic Issues

• World Bank Aid for cleaning of Ganga River

According to a press release on August 10, 2017, World Bank has sanctioned a loan of US \$1 billion for funding Institutional Development and for construction of priority infrastructure projects for municipal waste water treatment and solid waste treatment on the main stem of Ganga in the five Ganga basin states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. Government of India has withdrawn a cumulative amount of US \$91.26 million (Rs. 550.48 crore) under this loan till date.

Under Namami Gange project total number of 173 projects for various activities such as sewage infrastructure, river front development, ghat and crematoria, ghat cleaning, river surface cleaning, aforestation and biodiversity conservation and rural sanitation etc. have been sanctioned. Out of 173 projects, 41 numbers of projects have been completed so far.⁸⁸

• Japan's Economy Grows Again, in Longest Streak in 11 Years

According to government data released on August 14, 2017, Japan's economy grew more strongly than expected in the second quarter, extending the longest streak of uninterrupted growth in 11 years. Spending by Japanese consumers and businesses contributed more to the latest expansion than trade with the rest of the world. Japanese gross domestic product increased by 4 percent in annualized terms in the three months through June, the government's Cabinet Office said in a preliminary estimate. The economy has now expanded for six consecutive quarters, the first time it has gone that long without a contraction since the 2005-6 period.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Government of India, Press Bureau of Information, "World Bank Aid for cleaning of Ganga River", August 10, 2017, http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx (accessed on August 14, 2017)

^{89 &}quot;Japan's Economy Grows Again, in Longest Streak in 11 Years", *The New York Times*, August 13, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/business/economy/japan-second-quarter-gdp-rises.html (accessed on August 14, 2017)