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## Weekly Media Updates (13 - 19 February, 2017)

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## Africa

- Vice President's Visit to Rwanda<sup>1</sup>

Vice President Shri Hamid Ansari arrived in the Rwandan capital on the first leg of his five-day two-nation tour on 19 February 2017, which will also take him to another East African country Uganda. He was received at the Kigali International Airport by President of the Senate Bernard Makuza.

This is the first high-level visit from India to Rwanda. While interacting with a media delegation accompanying him onboard Air India One, Shri Ansari said, the visit is "part of a conscious effort by the Indian government to intensify interaction" with Africa.

The Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Vijay Sampla, four MPs -- Kanimozhi, Ranvijay Singh Judev, Raneer Narah and P K Biju, senior officials and a media delegation accompanied the Vice President.

During his visit to Rwanda from February 19-21 the Vice President will hold bilateral talks with the leadership and participate in a host of programmes. He would pay homage at the genocide museum (in Kigali), interact with the Indian community there and attend a banquet hosted by the Prime Minister of Rwanda.

Shri Ansari will launch India-Rwanda Innovation Growth Programme as part of which there would be a technology expo of India's low-cost innovations. The Vice President along with the Prime Minister of Rwanda would also address an India-Rwanda Business Forum.

Shri Ansari's visit comes shortly after the visit of President of Rwanda for the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in January this year. The visit is expected to deepen and expand the bilateral relationships.

- Tanzania Govt in Fresh bid to Attract Indian Drug Makers<sup>2</sup>

The government has urged pharmaceutical firms from India to set up factories in the country to cut importation costs. The call was made during a business meeting with a delegation of 30 representatives of Indian companies in Dar es Salaam on 18 February 2017.

Speaking during the meeting, Medical Stores Department (MSD) director general Laurean Bwanakunu said the government was spending at least \$300 million for importation of pharmaceutical products annually. According to him, out of 80 per cent of pharmaceutical products imported, at least 60 per cent was from India.

He added that setting up such industries in the country would also save time. It currently takes us up to six months after announcing the tender, to receive the

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<sup>1</sup> Business Standard .19 February 2017

<sup>2</sup> The Citizen, 18 February 2017

products. Seconding the notion, Tanzania Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture boss Ndibalema Mayanja assured India of favourable business environment should they decide to invest in Tanzania. He made the assurance capitalising on the stability of the country and its economic growth trend.

For his part, Indian High Commissioner Sandeep Arya expressed his confidence that the prospects for pharmaceuticals sector growth remain very bright in Tanzania, whose economy has been growing at the 7 per cent plus rate. His optimism is backed by the government's priority of improving healthcare and people's quest for better services.

He commended the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council for bringing a strong group of Indian manufacturers to one of the steadily growing economy and market in East Africa.

- **New Alliance Will Boost Intra-Africa Trade-Experts<sup>3</sup>**

According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) the formation of the African Corridor Management Alliance will go on to boost Intra Africa Trade .It will play a critical role in coordinating the sharing of best practices and other strategies in support of the development and management of economic corridors on the continent. Andrew Mold, a senior economic affairs officer of UN Economic Commission for Africa, for eastern Africa, said the establishment of ACMA is timely in view of the 2017 deadline and will play a key role in the negotiations on how to establish the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA).

According to World Bank, regional trade integration has long been a strategic objective for Africa, yet despite some success in eliminating tariffs within regional communities, the African market remains highly fragmented.

## North Africa

- **Libya: Initial Agreement on Egypt-led Roadmap<sup>4</sup>**

According to a high-level official source in Tabruk (Libya), the UN-backed government of Mr. Serraj has agreed to the preliminary clause of Cairo-led roadmap plan for Libya. This was announced after the meeting between Colonel Haftar and representative of the new Libyan government. According to information received by this Arabic daily, both sides have agreed to form a joint coordination committee to discuss and evolve the procedure and mechanism to share the power with the faction of Colonel Haftar. According to new roadmap plan initiated by Cairo recently the

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<sup>3</sup> The New Times, Rwanda ,18 February 2017

<sup>4</sup> Al-Arabi-Al-Jadeed

committee would consist of thirty members (fifteen each from the parliament and the High State Council). This committee would discuss several parameters of the current political scenario and it would work until a new date for the next election is announced. The sources in Egypt's foreign office told that the decision was reached after a prolonged meeting between two warring factions and Egyptian officials held a series of separate meetings with both the factions.

It is also reported that the head of the Libyan parliament has sought an assurance from Egypt to allow Colonel Haftar to continue with his current post of army chief without the endorsement from the State Higher Council. The names of the committee members would be announced very soon to discuss the division and the devolution of the power and they would continue to meet regularly until the new election process begins in the country. The sources further added that the coordination committee would also work to amend the constitution and to bring it for the national referendum. This committee is likely to face various challenges and the biggest one is to win the trust of the people and fulfill day-to-day requirements of the general masses. One of the members of the negotiating team in Cairo said that the committee would derive its authority and legitimacy from the agreement and Egyptian authority alone and he also added that the committee would begin its work very soon. He mentioned that the Presidential Council in Libya has lost its right to negotiate after the Cairo agreement and all future negotiations would be held between the parliament and the State Higher Council only.

- Coalition forces bombed hospital in West Mussel suspected to be operation center of ISIS<sup>5</sup>

The US-led military coalition has destroyed a medical center in west of Mussel which was suspected to be an operation center for the ISIS. There are contradictory reports about the casualty and according to one report, the military strike in the areas left many women and children dead. The military coalition source told that the command center of coalition came to know through its intelligence that it was not the building for medical purpose. For a long time, no media persons were allowed to enter the region which has been under the control of the ISIS. It is worth mentioning here that only last month the eastern part of the Mussel was liberated where the 650,000 people had remained hostage for more than two years. The assault against the building was conducted after a report revealed that a huge amount of ammunition and weapons were being carried from the mosques and churches to the hospital building.

- Egypt to investigate the religious leaning of its armed and police forces<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ashraqal-Awasat

<sup>6</sup> Al-Hayat

The President of Egypt, Mr. El-Sisi has hinted that there would be thorough investigation within the army and the police department to spot if any member of the armed forces or police forces has some leaning towards the radical ideology of Islam. According to some sources, the process of finding out the religious ideology and the religious orientation of the armed and police personals would begin very soon and the process would be very thorough and exhaustive. The investigation would also include the family members of the armed persons and police forces. It is also reported that in post-Morsi era, few member of the armed forces were found involved in terror acts in the country and some family member of the armed persons were also found guilty in several similar acts in the country. In recent months it has also been noticed that the radical and extremist group are targeting the army to polarize their camp and indoctrinate them in radical Islamic ideology. The home ministry of Egypt has announced to form a committee to map out the psychological and religious inclination of both armed and police personals. According to a report, a member of the central security force was involved in assassination attempt of President El-Sisi when he was only defense minister. Same member of the central force was also accused of providing the secret of the government plan to break their sit-in in Cairo after the removal of President Morsi to the MBH activists. The report also told that a brother of the same police person was the member of MBH executive committee and was involved in a series of attack against the higher government official in Egypt.

## Central Asia

### Kyrgyz President visit Europe

President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev visited Belgium and Germany from 15 – 18 February 2017. Kyrgyz republic and EU enjoy cordial relations. The bilateral relations have progressed under the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in 1995 and implemented 1999. The PCA identified three major areas of cooperation: political dialogue, economic engagement and sectoral cooperation.

During the visit President Atambayev held meetings with Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission; Donald Tusk European Council President, and Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Security Policy and Foreign Affairs. In Atambayev's visit to European Union at Brussels, a number of agreements were concluded. The EU is to provide Kyrgyzstan a grant of euro 72 million in seven years period. The fund will be used to continue and sustain the reform process in the

country. Besides, significant portion of this amount will be spent for the development of agriculture in the country's southern part.<sup>7</sup>

High Representative Mogherini reiterated the EU's commitment to support the Kyrgyz authorities in building democracy and ensuring sustainable economic growth. She underlined the 'good progress made with regard to electoral reform'.<sup>8</sup>

President Almazbek Atambayev paid a working visit to Germany and met various German leaders on 18 February, including Chancellor Angela Merkel. The two leaders discussed Kyrgyz-German relations and the prospects for further enhancing cooperation in trade, investment and banking sectors.<sup>9</sup> Atambayev also presented Chancellor Merkel the Kurmanjan Datka Order for contribution to the development of bilateral relations and in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In his visit to Germany, the Kyrgyz President also participated in the Munich Security Conference and met in Munich with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.<sup>10</sup>

## European Union

- Germany to Expand Defence Cooperation with European Countries

Germany is taking initiatives to expand defence cooperation with European countries. Reportedly, Germany will set up a joint fleet of Lockheed Martin Corp C-130J transport planes with France and join a Netherlands-led fleet of Airbus A330 tanker planes. Several other initiatives with other European countries can be taken. Norway, Romania and the Czech Republic are part of a broader framework to improve European defence cooperation.

- Jaroslaw Kaczynski Opposed Second Term for Donald Tusk

The head of the ruling Law and Justice Party, Jaroslaw Kaczynski has opposed the second term for Donald Tusk as the President of European Council. He said that it would not be in interest of his country. Donald Tusk's term is going to end in May.

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<sup>7</sup> East Time, "Kyrgyzstan To Receive EUR72 Million In Grants From The EU," 18 February 2017, <http://www.easttime.info/news/kyrgyzstan/kyrgyzstan-receive-eur72-million-grants-eu>

<sup>8</sup> European Union External Action, "Meeting between Federica Mogherini and the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Almazbek Atambaev," 16 February 2017, [https://eas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/20626/meeting-between-federica-mogherini-and-president-kyrgyz-republic-almazbek-atambaev\\_en](https://eas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/20626/meeting-between-federica-mogherini-and-president-kyrgyz-republic-almazbek-atambaev_en)

<sup>9</sup> Kabar, "Atambayev awards Merkel the Kurmanjan Datka Order," 18 February 2017, <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/news/atambayev-awards-merkel-the-kurmanjan-datka-order/>

<sup>10</sup> Kabar, "President Atambayev takes part in the Munich Security Conference," 18 February 2017, <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/news/president-atambayev-takes-part-in-the-munich-security-conference/>

Donald Tusk said that he would like to continue his work. The EU member states are likely to take a decision by end of March, 2017.

- House of Lords Begins Debate on Notification of Withdrawal/Brexit Bill

The House of Lords has been debating the Notification of Withdrawal bill informally known as brexit bill. The bill is intended to start the process of brexit from the European Union. The Theresa May government has stated that it would start the formal negotiations with the European Union by end of March, 2017. After the Supreme Court verdict, the government is taking formal approval of the Parliament. The House of Commons has approved the bill. Now the house of Lords is debating the bill.

- Turkish Prime Minister Addressed a Rally in Germany

Turkish Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim addressed a rally at a stadium in Oberhausen, Germany. He called for Turks to support a referendum, which would expand powers of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Around three million people of Turkish origins live in Germany. The Prime Minister also said that Turkey will track down the people who participated in a failed-military coup in July 2016. The referendum will be held on 16 April 2017.

- Munich Security Conference 2017:

The Munich Security Conference kicked off last week from on 17 February - 19 February 2017 in Munich where more than 500 decision makers from across the globe, including more than 25 heads of state and government, 80 foreign and defense ministers, and strong delegations from the new US administration and from Congress, come together in Munich for discussions on major international challenges. The basis for discussion in the "Munich Security Report" published before the conference was titled "Post-Truth, Post-West, Post-Order?". The central background themes are the growing insecurity since the election of Donald Trump and the sense that this and other developments could ultimately herald a world order.

Republican Senator and Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee John McCain in his speech on the 17<sup>th</sup> remarked that the resignation of the new president's security adviser Michael Flynn over his contacts with Russia reflected deep problems in Washington. He also remarked that the West had grown "complacent and "had made mistakes". Therefore, he went on highlighting the purpose of the assembling at the Munich Security Conference every year. "That is why we come to Munich, year in and year out—to revitalize our common moral purpose, our belief that our values are worth the fighting for. Because in the final analysis, the survival of the West is not just

a material struggle; it is now, and has always been, a moral struggle. Now more than ever, we must not forget this.”<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis remarked that the bond between the United States and its NATO allies is a critical component in regional and global security. He also said that the “transatlantic bond remains our strongest bulwark against instability and violence.” NATO exists, he said, to protect the way of life of its members, to include the exchange of free ideas that characterizes the annual Munich Security Conference.<sup>12</sup> Mattis said the United States and its European allies had a shared understanding of the challenges ahead. He however, has spoken out strongly against Russia while in Europe. After talks with NATO allies in Brussels before the Conference, he said that he did not believe it would be possible to collaborate militarily with Moscow, at least for now.<sup>13</sup>

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the Conference. On Russia saying it is the Western alliance, not Moscow, that is destabilizing Europe by sending troops to its western borders, Stoltenberg replied that, “We have different views”, where the West accuses the Kremlin of arming separatist rebels in a conflict that has killed 10,000 people since April 2014. Russia says the conflict is a civil war.<sup>14</sup>

US Vice President Mike Pence, reiterating that the US remained committed to Nato, attempted to soothe concerns that Trump might deal directly with Putin, bypassing western Europe. The audience welcomed his promise that Russia will be held “accountable” for its actions in Ukraine, although he didn’t spell out how. But on the same hand, he also repeated U.S. calls for more defense spending in return.

His meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel was described by German aides as “very friendly”. Pence called Tehran “the leading state sponsor of terrorism”. Pence’s strident vow to consign Islamist militants “to the ash-heap of history” also raised eyebrows, European officials said. Meanwhile, U.S. Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly defended Trump’s directive suspending travel to the United States by citizens of seven mostly Muslim countries, since blocked by US judges. Kelly said he would produce a “tighter, more streamlined version” soon, saying: “We need to find ways to

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<sup>11</sup> “Remarks by SASC Chairman John McCain at the 2017 Munich Security Conference”, February 17, 2017, John Mc Cain Speeches, <http://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/2/remarks-by-sasc-chairman-john-mccain-at-the-2017-munich-security-conference> accessed February 20, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Ferdinando, Lisa, “Mattis stresses NATO importance at Munich Security Conference”, US Department of Defence, February 17, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1087792/mattis-stresses-nato-importance-at-munich-security-conference> accessed February 20, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart, Phil and Robin Emmott, “Trump’s team in disarray, US Senator Mc Cain tells Europe”, *Reuters*, February 18, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-mccain-trump-idUSKBN15W210> accessed February 20, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



vet in a more reliable way to satisfy us that people coming to the United States are coming for the right reasons."<sup>15</sup>

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has told the Munich Security Conference that multilateral efforts are needed to cope with current challenges. She stressed that NATO was in the interests not only of Europe, but of the US. Merkel remarked that problems such as those posed by Islamist terrorism could not be mastered by one nation alone, and called for a "networked world." At the same time, she said it was necessary to improve and streamline multilateral bodies such as the European Union, while stressing how vital they were.<sup>16</sup> Germany's defence minister, Ursula von der Leyen, acknowledged that her country would in future be unable to step back and rely on American protection.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has warned the UK it cannot negotiate bilateral trade deals in the period before it leaves the EU. He also said he did not believe it would be possible for negotiations for Britain's departure from the EU to be completed within the two year time period stipulated after Article 50 is triggered. Mr. Juncker also said at least 20,000 laws had to be changed in Britain before it could leave the bloc and repeated that Britain has no right to complete bilateral trade deals while still in the EU.<sup>17</sup>

- Eurozone reports sluggish economic growth:

The German economy expanded less than expected in the final three months of 2016, dragging down growth in the 19-nation eurozone. Europe's largest economy expanded by 0.4% between October and December, according to the German statistics Office Destatis. This was lower than the 0.5% forecast by economists. German growth in the third quarter was revised lower too, to 0.1% from 0.2%.

With Italian growth also disappointing, economic conditions in the eurozone at the end of last year were not quite as rosy as previously thought. Eurostat, the European Commission's stats office, cut its growth estimate from 0.5% to 0.4%, the same pace as in the third quarter, with industrial production down sharply in December 2016. At the other end of the growth scale, the Greek economy contracted by 0.4%, while Finland shrank 0.5%, as years of austerity and the sanctions imposed on neighbouring Russia took their toll.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rampton, Roberta and Shadia Nasralla, "With greetings from Trump, Pence says US committed to Europe", *Reuters*, February 18, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-usa-idUSKBN15X06Q> accessed February 20, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> "Merkel stresses NATO also crucial for US", *DW*, February 18, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/merkel-stresses-nato-also-crucial-for-us/a-37609965> accessed February 20, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> "Brexit talks will take longer than two years, says Jean Claude Juncker", *The Telegraph*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/17/brexit-talks-will-take-longer-two-years-says-jean-claudejuncker/> accessed February 20, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Kollowe, Julia, "Eurozone reports sluggish growth, failing to meet expectations", *The Guardian*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/feb/14/eurozone-sluggish-growth-failing-to-meet-expectations-economy> accessed February 20, 2017.

- Romanian parliament approves anti-corruption referendum:

Romania's parliament has agreed to hold a referendum on fighting official corruption following pressure from public protests. An estimated 70,000 people took to the streets on Sunday for the 13th consecutive night of anti-government demonstrations. Those campaigning have accused the government of attempting to water down anti-corruption laws.

Parliament has already backed down over a planned decree that would have made the crime of abusing power punishable only if the sum exceeded 200,000 lei (£37,600). Last week, 310 lawmakers voted in favour of the referendum proposed by the president, Klaus Iohannis. After the Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu withdrew the decree, demonstrations have continued to draw large crowds demanding the resignation of the government, which assumed power last month.<sup>19</sup>

## North America

### I. Canada

- Concern over Illegal Border Crossing from the US

Two Conservative MPs are calling on the federal government to act to stop the flow of people irregularly crossing the United States border into Canada. Michelle Rempel and Tony Clement tweeted that the crossings are unsafe and place a burden on local law enforcement. "The government must respond to this situation in a way that keeps Canadians safe, and sends a strong message to those considering an illegal crossing that there are proper channels to do this." Officials have said a growing number of people are choosing to walk across the border into Canada to claim refugee status, including dozens who have been arrested in the Emerson area in recent weeks. Other provinces including Quebec have also seen a large rise in the number of refugee claimants who enter the province irregularly. The tactic is a way to avoid the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement, which prevents most people who have been living in the United States from making a refugee claim at an official border crossing on the premise that they are already somewhere safe.<sup>20</sup>

- Canada doing more than just military spending for NATO: Trudeau  
Canada's indifference to the ever-present push for more NATO spending was laid bare y in Germany as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau all but shrugged off Donald Trump's push to squeeze alliance members for more money. Standing alongside

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<sup>19</sup> French, Katie, "Romanian Parliament approves anti-corruption referendum", *The Guardian*, February 13, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/13/romania-approves-anti-corruption-referendum> accessed February 20, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Morgan Lowrie, "Two Tory MPs call on Ottawa to stop irregular Canada-U.S. border crossings," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/canada-conservative-mps-border-crossing-1.3990697>, Accessed on 20 Feb. 2017.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose country has already promised significant increases to its own NATO contributions, Trudeau suggested that when it comes to demonstrating Canada's commitment, money isn't everything. He acknowledged the spending target agreed to in 2014 by the members of the 28-country transatlantic alliance — two per cent of GDP annually — but described Canada and Germany as principal NATO actors who do much of the "heavy lifting." "There are many ways of evaluating one's contribution to NATO," Trudeau said.<sup>21</sup>

- Prime Minister Trudeau completes a successful visit to Europe

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today concluded a successful visit to France and Germany from February 16 to 17, 2017. During the visit, the Prime Minister addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, and visited Berlin and Hamburg, Germany. The Prime Minister's visit reinforced the close bonds between Canada, Germany, and the European Union (EU). It was also an opportunity to promote Canada's role as a leader on progressive trade and investment, and highlight how the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) will create good, well-paying jobs, bolster our shared prosperity, and help grow the middle class. During his historic address to the European Parliament, the Prime Minister spoke of the importance Canada places on its relationship with the EU and welcomed the European Parliament's vote to approve CETA and the Canada-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement.<sup>22</sup>

- Canada ready for Latvia Mission

The first Canadian troops will arrive in Latvia in June, kicking off a much-anticipated NATO deployment to restrain potential Russian ambitions in eastern Europe, Gen. Jonathan Vance said. Roughly 450 Canadians will form the backbone and leadership of a multinational battle group that will eventually number between 1,200 and 1,500 troops. Four countries — Albania, Italy, Poland and Slovenia — have promised to contribute troops and equipment to the Canadian-led contingent. Those countries will have their troops on the ground by the fall, the chief of defence staff said.<sup>23</sup>

## II. United States

- Prime Minister Netanyahu visit to the United States

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<sup>21</sup> Mike Blanchfield, "Canada doing more than just military spending for NATO: Trudeau," <http://www.torontosun.com/2017/02/17/canada-doing-more-than-just-military-spending-for-nato-trudeau>, Accessed on 20 February 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister of Canada, "Prime Minister Trudeau concludes successful visit to Europe," <http://pm.gc.ca/eng>, Accessed on 20 February 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Murray Brewste, "Canadians prepare to face cyberwarriors and fake news in Latvia mission," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-latvia-deployment-1.3988719>, Accessed on 20 February 2017.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was in Washington to renew the US-Israel relationship after eight strained years during the Obama administration. The Israeli leader and President Donald Trump declared their mutual support and outlined similar views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the realities of the region and entrenched positions on all sides are likely to intrude on the relationship at some point.<sup>24</sup>

- Vice President Mike Pence's visits Europe

Europe's leaders gathered in apprehensive mood in Munich on Saturday for their first chance to weigh up the new US leadership's approach to collective defence in the face of what many perceive as a growing Russian threat. The signs have been mixed, and confusing, since Donald Trump won election last November. He initially signalled warmth towards Vladimir Putin and some scorn towards Nato. More recently he has appeared to backtrack on both fronts. The US vice-president Mike Pence, making his first visit to Europe since taking office, failed to quell those anxieties in a speech on Saturday at the Munich security conference.<sup>25</sup>

- US NSA resigns

Michael T. Flynn, the national security adviser, resigned. It was revealed that he had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other top White House officials about his conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States. Mr. Flynn, who served in the job for less than a month, said he had given "incomplete information" regarding a telephone call he had with the ambassador in late December about American sanctions against Russia, weeks before Mr. Trump's inauguration. Mr. Flynn previously had denied that he had any substantive conversations with Ambassador Sergey I. Kislyak, and Mr. Pence repeated that claim in television interviews as recently as this month. But former administration official said the Justice Department warned the White House last month that Mr. Flynn had not been fully forthright about his conversations with the ambassador. As a result, the Justice Department feared that Mr. Flynn could be vulnerable to blackmail by Moscow. The White House said in the statement that it was replacing Mr. Flynn with retired Lt. Gen. Joseph K. Kellogg Jr. of the Army, a Vietnam War veteran, as acting national security adviser.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Nicole Gaouette and Elise Labott, "Netanyahu, Trump rekindle US-Israel bond as Mideast tensions loom," <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/14/politics/trump-israel-netanyahu-washington-visit/>, Accessed on 20 february 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Ewen MacAskill, "Pence's speech on Nato leaves European leaders troubled over alliance's future," <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/18/trump-pence-eu-nato-munich-conference-germany-britain>, Accessed on 20 February 2017.

<sup>26</sup> MAGGIE HABERMAN, MATTHEW ROSENBERG, MATT APUZZO and GLENN THRUSH, "Michael Flynn Resigns as National Security Adviser," [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/13/us/politics/donald-trump-national-security-adviser-michael-flynn.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/13/us/politics/donald-trump-national-security-adviser-michael-flynn.html?_r=0), Accessed on 14 February 2017.

### III. Mexico

- Mexico warns U.S. trade war could be a threat to security co-operation.

If U.S. President Donald Trump attempts to impose unfavourable terms of trade, Mexico may retaliate by ceasing to co-operate on drug enforcement, migration control, security and intelligence, a Mexican cabinet minister told The Globe and Mail in one of his government's most explicit warnings to date in the rhetorical battle with the new U.S. administration. Contrary to Mr. Trump's frequent assertions about Mexicans pouring over the border into the United States, the net flow of Mexicans has been from the United States into Mexico for several years. However, Mexico has for the past three years been providing a sort of outsourced border control service, 3,000 kilometres to the south, called Programa Frontera Sur. The United States has given Mexico more than \$86-million (U.S.) in equipment and training to set up a sort of dragnet across the southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Veracruz to stop migrants fleeing violence in Central America. In addition, Mexico has been growing in popularity in recent years as a route for migrants and refugees from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa headed for the United States.<sup>27</sup>

- Mexicans form human chain to protest the US wall.

Hundreds of Mexicans have protested against Donald Trump's plan to build a wall along the US's southern border by making a human chain. Up to 1,500 Mexicans, many of them students, linked arms and waved banners along the Rio Grande, near the city of Ciudad Juarez. Mr Trump made construction of a wall along the Mexican border the highlight of his presidential campaign and signed an executive order on building a wall less than a week after taking office.<sup>28</sup>

## Latin American and Caribbean

- Argentina's Macri, Trump discuss Venezuela in call - spokesman<sup>29</sup>

Argentina's President Mauricio Macri and U.S. President Donald Trump shared their "concern" over Venezuela in a Wednesday phone call, Macri's spokesman told Reuters.

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<sup>27</sup> Stephanie Nolen, "Mexico warns U.S. trade war could be a threat to security co-operation," <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/mexico-could-end-drug-security-co-operation-if-trump-pushes-trade-terms-economy-minister-warns/article34084870/>, Accessed on 20 February 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Buncombe, "Mexicans form human chain on US border to protest Donald Trump's immigration plan," <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-mexico-border-wall-protest-human-chain-rio-grande-a7588786.html>, Accessed on 20 February 2017.

<sup>29</sup> <http://in.reuters.com/article/argentina-usa-venezuela-idINKBN15U2SK>

Trump also invited Macri to visit the United States, the office of Argentina's presidency said in a statement. The two leaders spoke broadly about Latin America and on "Venezuela in particular" in the five-minute-long call, the statement said.

Venezuela's socialist government had its first diplomatic flare-up with the Trump administration this week after the U.S. blacklisted Venezuela's Vice President Tareck El Aissami on drug charges, a move El Aissami decried as "imperialist aggression."

Macri, a centre-right leader who took office in late 2015 following more than a decade of leftist rule in Argentina, also spoke to Trump in November. Macri, a former businessman, met Trump decades earlier while working on a real estate deal for his father, Franco Macri.

- Argentine, Chinese officials, experts laud fruitful development of bilateral ties<sup>30</sup>

Argentina and China established diplomatic ties on Feb. 19, 1972. The following are highlights from statements or interviews with political leaders, diplomats, economists, advisers and experts of both sides: "Our link with China is a link we assign enormous importance to. We have complementary capacities: China needs to work on its food security and Argentina is a very good partner for that. Argentina needs more energy and China is a very good partner for that. Argentina needs very much to improve its infrastructure and China has been very successful in building new infrastructure, and that complementarity should work very well," Argentine President Mauricio Macri said.

Argentine Foreign Minister Susana Malcorra said: "Our ties are at a very good juncture. The prior administration (of ex-president Cristina Fernandez) signed an agreement of a strategic nature (and) we have sustained and maintained it, the commitment is there and we are moving forward. There are multiple topics on which we are working that show that mutual interest in maintaining this relationship is very high, and we will continue to do that."

Chinese Ambassador to Argentina Yang Wanming said: "It is with great satisfaction that today I see our binational ties bolstered, transforming a traditional friendship into a comprehensive strategic partnership. China and Argentina, situated at two opposite extremes of the Earth, and despite the distance that separates them, maintain a longstanding friendship that is renewed and strengthened with the passing of time."

Diego Guelar, Argentine Ambassador to China, said: "Our ties with China are the most important world ties Argentina has, both because of the current agenda and because of its potential to grow and deepen. We are building a long-term, mature relationship that is not tied to ideology, but to national interest. China is a central player in the international system, complementary with our country and interested in continuing to consolidate bilateral ties."

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<sup>30</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-02/19/c\\_136067837.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-02/19/c_136067837.htm)

Wang Liang, commercial attache at China's embassy in Buenos Aires, said: "Bilateral ties have reached a very high level, considering that 45 years ago we started from a very low level. Political trust between the two countries, like pragmatic cooperation, has increased significantly. China is Argentina's second-largest trade partner, the leading destination for Argentina's agricultural exports and also the third-biggest foreign investor in Argentina."

Argentina's former Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana (2005-2010) said: "Over the past four decades, ties between Argentina and China were strengthened and deepened at various levels. Undoubtedly, the accelerated increase in trade exchange is a notable factor, but political, economic, cultural, social and academic ties between the two countries also intensified starting in 2003, when Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) became president."

Estanislao Zawels, director for Asia and Oceania at Argentina's Foreign Ministry, said: "In addition to the political and economic ties between the two governments, and the cooperation in multilateral forums, our bilateral relationship is cemented in increasing mutual knowledge of each other's civil societies. Over the past years, the binational relationship has seen harmonious and fluid development."

Economist Gustavo Girado, head of consulting firm Asia & Argentina, said: "The bilateral relationship Argentina has with China is one of the two or three most important relationships the country has worldwide. For Argentina, China has not only become a highly important trade partner, but also a very important and special investor and political partner."

Sergio Cesarin, coordinator of the Asia-Pacific and India Studies Center at the Tres de Febrero National University, said: "The (two) countries ... maintain very deep political dialogues on many issues, and the economic agenda has been greatly expanded, from the perspective of trade. The economic and social players taking part in the relationship have gradually increased, and the number of treaties and bilateral agreements are another indicator."

- British Foreign Secretary to visit Argentina<sup>31</sup>

Following the trip of an Argentine parliamentary group to the United Kingdom, it has been confirmed that Britain's Foreign Secretary, the eccentric Conservative Boris Johnson (one of the creators of Brexit), will be visiting Buenos Aires in April or May in order to follow up the agreements reached between the governments of President Mauricio Macri and Prime Minister Theresa May.

Johnson will not be the only visitor to Argentina. March will see the arrival of UK Deputy Trade Minister Greg Hands and Alderman Andrew Parmley, the Lord Mayor of the City of London (the financial district) while on March 23 a trade mission organised by the Argentine-British Chamber of Commerce (CCAB) will be heading in the opposite direction.

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/224645/british-foreign-secretary-to-visit-argentina>

All this came to light upon the conclusion of the Argentine parliamentary visit to the UK.

“The balance of the visit was highly positive, During changing times in the world, we could confirm at different levels the strong interest in Argentina and in exploring ways to deepen the bilateral relationship,” said Senator Federico Pinedo (Pro-Capital), who headed the group. Pinedo met up with British Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan to go over what he called a “positive” bilateral agenda. The conversations included Argentina’s probable entry into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The parliamentary delegation also reminded Duncan of Argentina’s “historic position” on the Malvinas issue, defending the sovereignty rights to the islands, while both sides highlighted the advances made by the International Red Cross’s first exploratory mission to identify Argentine “unknown soldiers” lying in Darwin cemetery.

- Cuba and Norway for Strengthening Bilateral relations<sup>32</sup>

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez and State Secretary Laila Bokhari of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed the wish of both nations to continue strengthening their relations.

During the meeting, both officials debated on the positive state of two-way ties, the Cuban Foreign Ministry reported. Later Laila Bokhari, who is making an official visit to this Caribbean nation, met with Rogelio Sierra, deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, in the context of inter-chancelleries political consultation session. On that occasion, both officials discussed on the main issues relating to the bilateral agenda, including the prospects for the progress of political ties and for the areas of trade, investment and cooperation.

## Russia

- Russia and India Relations (Defence)

Russia has said that the fifth generation fighter aircraft (FGFA) program that is being planned with India would be a 'completely new aircraft' and is not linked to Moscow's own new generation fighter, the Sukhoi T 50. In a detailed discussion, Russia's largest state holding company in the defence sector, Rostec has said that it is worrying that faster progress has not been made by the Indian side to finalise the project. There has been little progress on the FGFA project since 2010, when then defence minister AK Antony had announced that all issues have been resolved and the air force said that it expects deliveries to start in 2017. However, India and Russia have not yet signed an agreement to take the project forward, with the air force constituting a new three member committee to re-evaluate the project. On whether the

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.cadenagramonte.cu/english/show/articles/26087:cuba-and-norway-for-strengthening-bilateral-relations>



Russian side would be willing to work on integrating a western engine to the fifth generation aircraft (Russia has been facing delays due to this), the executive, Viktor N Kladov, Director, International Cooperation, Rostec, said that such an approach would not be practical due to the history of sanctions by western powers. "Even in our plans to develop a new commercial aircraft to take on Boeing and Airbus, we are insisting on our own engine due to the past sanctions. In a military project these concerns are even more," Kladov said.<sup>33</sup>

- Russia and the US Relations

Speaking at a NATO conference in Brussels on February 16, US Defense Secretary James Mattis said that the US is "not in a position right now" to collaborate with Russia on military matters. He accused Russia of violating international law, labelling its actions as "aggressive" and "destabilizing." He said that with the help of the political leaders both the countries can come to a common ground. On the hacking issue, Mattis said that there is "very little doubt" that Russia has interfered in a number of democratic elections. He said that Russia might have either interfered or attempted to interfere in the US elections. He also said that reiterated US support for NATO while highlighting the threat posed by Moscow. He labelled NATO a "fundamental bedrock for the US and all the transatlantic community," and urged it be wary. However, he also warned that the US could "moderate" its commitment to NATO if other member states fail to meet the requisite spending targets. Just five of the 28 member states currently meet the alliance's spending target of 2% of GDP -- leading Mattis to urge others to pay up.<sup>34</sup>

- On February 16, a Russian spy ship patrolled 30 miles offshore a US Navy submarine base in Connecticut. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., a member of the House Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, said the ship was spotted about 30 miles from the Naval Submarine Base New London, located in Groton, Conn. It is the Navy's primary East Coast submarine base. A US defense official said that the SSV-175 Viktor Leonov sailing in international waters is outfitted with a variety of high-tech spying equipment designed to intercept signals intelligence. The official noted it is not the first time the ship has been deployed off the coast of the US. The Leonov carried out similar patrols in 2014

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<sup>33</sup>Manu Pubby, "Indo-Russia fifth generation fighter aircraft will be completely new, not linked to Sukhoi T 50: Russia", *Economic Times*, February 16, 2017. <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indo-russia-fifth-generation-fighter-aircraft-will-be-completely-new-not-linked-to-sukhoi-t-50-russia/articleshow/57185821.cms> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

<sup>34</sup>James Masters, "Trump defense chief Mattis: US not ready for military cooperation with Russia", *CNN*, February 16, 2017. <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/16/politics/mattis-russia-military-cooperation/> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

and 2015 off the Florida coast, and such missions were more common during the Cold War.<sup>35</sup>

- US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on February 16 that Russia must abide by a 2015 deal aimed at ending fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists as the Trump administration searches for ways to work cooperatively with Moscow. The former Exxon Mobil CEO spoke after meeting Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for the first time, in the highest-level face-to-face contact between representatives from the two countries since Trump took office on Jan. 20. "As we search for new common ground, we expect Russia to honor its commitments to the Minsk agreements and work to de-escalate the violence in the Ukraine," Tillerson said after talks with Lavrov. He said that "As I made clear in my Senate confirmation hearing, the United States will consider working with Russia where we can find areas of practical cooperation that will benefit the American people."<sup>36</sup>
- Deutsche Bank, which is under investigation by the US Department of Justice and is facing intense regulatory scrutiny, was looking for evidence of whether recent loans to Trump, which were struck in highly unusual circumstances, may have been underpinned by financial guarantees from Moscow. Possible links with Russia are a matter of acute sensitivity inside the bank. The Trump administration has been fighting accusations contained in a dossier by a former MI6 officer that it secretly colluded before the US election with Russia's president, Vladimir Putin. Trump has rubbished the claim as fake news. In January a US regulator, the New York Department of Financial Services, fined Deutsche Bank \$425m for laundering around \$10bn of Russian money. The US Department of Justice is still investigating the Russian scheme.<sup>37</sup>
- US Senator Lindsey Graham promised that Congress will press ahead with a bill to sanction Russia for interfering in the U.S. presidential election, and investigate the methods it used, to make sure other countries don't fall victim to similar hacking attacks. Graham on February 19 told the Munich Security Conference that a Senate bill to sanction Russia is likely to get more than 75 votes and Trump should sign it. He said that the year 2017 "is going to be a year of kicking Russia in the ass in Congress." Graham called for an "Article 5"

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<sup>35</sup>Doug Stanglin, "Russian spy ship patrols 30 miles off the coast of Connecticut", *USA Today*, February 15, 2017. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/02/15/russian-spy-ship-spotted-near-us/97939010/> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

<sup>36</sup>"US secretary of state says Russia must honour Ukraine deal", *ABC News*, February 16, 2017. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/us-secretary-state-tillerson-meets-russias-lavrov-45531532> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

<sup>37</sup>Luke Harding, Stephanie Kirchgaessner, Nick Hopkins and David Smith, "Deutsche Bank examined Donald Trump's account for Russia links", *The Guardian*, February 16, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/16/deutsche-bank-examined-trump-account-for-russia-links> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

commitment between Republicans and Democrats that an attack on one is an attack on all. That's a reference to the part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's charter that obligates members to protect one another if attacked. "To our German friends, you're next," Graham said. "To our friends in France, they're coming after you. To my friend Mr. Lavrov, I hope you finally suffer some consequences for what you and your regime have been doing to democracies." In remarks to the Conference, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pushed back against the accusation, saying no one had put forward any proof. "Somehow when we are blamed, no one asked for facts," Lavrov said. "Give us some facts."<sup>38</sup>

- Addressing the Munich Security Conference on February 18, Lavrov said that Russia wants to build pragmatic relations with the United States based on mutual respect. He also described NATO as a "Cold War institution" whose expansion had led to unprecedented tensions in Europe over the past thirty years.<sup>39</sup>
- Sen. John McCain said in an interview published on February 18 that he takes Russian meddling in the 2016 election "more seriously than a physical attack." He also said that he "didn't know what to make" of an explosive, and still largely unsubstantiated, dossier which alleged the Russian government had compromising information on President Donald Trump. McCain projected a hawkish stance on Russia and said Russian interference in the American election had risked undermining "the foundation of democracy." McCain also said the Trump administration still had questions to answer about the circumstances surrounding former national security adviser Michael Flynn's ouster, which he called a sign of "dysfunction."<sup>40</sup>
- Russia and Ukraine  
President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia signed a decree over the weekend recognizing passports issued by two separatist governments in eastern Ukraine, a step that Ukraine said would complicate peace negotiations. Putin's decree stopped short of formally recognizing the two breakaway provinces as independent states. But it added to the Kremlin's pattern of creeping

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<sup>38</sup>Nick Wadhams and Patrick Donahue, "Lindsey Graham Says 2017 Is All About Hitting Back at Russia", *Bloomberg*, February 19, 2017. <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-02-19/lindsey-graham-says-2017-is-all-about-hitting-back-at-russia> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

<sup>39</sup>"Russia wants pragmatic relations with U.S., says Lavrov", *Reuters*, February 18, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-nato-lavrov-idUSKBN15XOCM> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

<sup>40</sup>Matt Shuham, "McCain On Explosive Trump Dossier: 'The Russians Do Use Women And Sex'", *TPM*, February 18, 2017. <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/new-york-magazine-profile-john-mccain> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

bureaucratic acceptance of pro-Russian rebel groups in what are known as frozen conflict zones.<sup>41</sup>

## South Asia

### Afghanistan

- Afghanistan and EU sign Partnership and Development Agreement<sup>42</sup>

A new agreement was signed between the Afghan government and the European Union to further strengthen partnership between the two sides. The agreement also paves the way for the bilateral cooperation on development, the Office of the President, ARG Palace said. Afghanistan's Minister of Finance Eklil Hakimi and Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy signed the agreement. According to ARG Palace, the agreement was signed in the presence of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany. The agreement formally describes EU's cooperation with Afghanistan covering law enforcement, health, development, agriculture, education, science and technology. Other sectors including fight against corruption and money laundering are also covered in the agreement signed between the two sides. Afghanistan will also receive support from EU to curb financial support to terrorism besides stepping up fight against the organized crimes and eradication of opium and suppressing the groups producing and smuggling illicit drugs.

- UAE ambassador to Afghanistan dies of injuries in bomb attack<sup>43</sup>

The United Arab Emirates says its ambassador to Afghanistan has died of injuries he sustained in a last-month bomb attack in Afghanistan's southern city of Kandahar. The UAE state media announced Juma Mohammad Abdullah al-Kaabi's death on

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<sup>41</sup>Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Will Accept Passports Issued by East Ukraine Separatists", *The New York Times*, February 19, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/19/world/europe/russia-east-ukraine-separatists.html? r=0> (Accessed on February 20, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> "Afghanistan and EU sign Partnership and Development Agreement", *Kabul Tribune*, 20 February 2017. URL: <http://www.kabultribune.com/index.php/2017/02/20/afghanistan-and-eu-sign-partnership-and-development-agreement/> accessed on 20 February 2017.

<sup>43</sup> "UAE ambassador to Afghanistan dies of injuries in bomb attack", *Afghanistan Online press*, 16 February 2017. URL: <http://www.aopnews.com/page/2/> accessed on 18 February 2017.

Thursday. He had been targeted in a spate of bomb attacks in three Afghan cities that killed 57 people, including five UAE diplomats. Kaabi, who was leading a delegation to the provincial governor's office at the time of the attack, was returned to the UAE on a military plane two days after the incident. The Taliban claimed responsibility for two other attacks in Kabul and Lashkar Gah, but they did not assume responsibility for the Kandahar attack that killed the UAE diplomat. Provincial police chief of Kandahar Abdul Raziq accused the Haqqani network, a group allied with the Taliban, of launching the attack.

- MoD: Cross-Border Shelling by Pakistan an Act of Aggression<sup>44</sup>

The Ministry of Defense (MoD) has warned that Pakistan's missile attacks on the eastern regions of the country would have serious consequences, suggesting that a diplomatic solution of the issues between the two neighbours needed to be found. There are efforts to find a diplomatic resolution of the issue, but if diplomacy does not work, Afghanistan maintains the right to retaliate, a defense ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri said on Sunday. This new Mod statement comes two days after the Pakistani military forces started firing missile from across the Durand Line on the eastern regions of Afghanistan. The bombing has sparked an outcry among the Afghans over Pakistan's hostile policy toward Afghanistan. During the past two days, the Pakistani army has fired scores of missiles on Goshta and Laalpur districts in eastern Nangarhar province and the Sarkano district of the eastern Kunar province. The MoD has said that Afghanistan is trying to show restraint to the attacks, but warned that it can lose patience unless Islamabad stops the hostile and provocative acts.

- U.S. Considers Increasing its Training Force in Afghanistan<sup>45</sup>

In a meeting with President Ashraf Ghani on the sidelines of Munich Security Conference on Saturday, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said the United States continues to assess "the increase of American troops for training their Afghan counterparts", the Presidential Palace said in a statement. Pence said Afghanistan has "a special importance for the United States and they will continue their cooperation and support to the Afghan government and the Afghan people", the statement said. Pence also commended "the courage and efforts of Afghan Security and Defense Forces". President Ghani meanwhile thanked the United States for its support to Afghanistan and praised the U.S. forces for their sacrifices in the country. Ghani said in their meeting that the war in Afghanistan was not a "an internal war" rather that Afghanistan was on the frontline of global security and the fight against terrorism.

- Afghan Refugees Remain in Pakistan Extended To End Of 2017<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "MoD: Cross-Border Shelling By Pakistan An Act of Aggression", *Tolonews*, 19 February 2017. URL: <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/mod-cross-border-shelling-pakistan-act-aggression> accessed on 20 February 2017.

<sup>45</sup> "U.S. Considers Increasing Its Training Force In Afghanistan", *Tolonews*, 18 February 2017. URL: <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/us-considers-increasing-its-training-force-afghanistan> accessed on 20 February 2017.

The Minister of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi on Friday said Pakistan agreed not to link the refugees issue to political differences between the two countries. Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) met on Wednesday evening and agreed that those Afghan refugees who have a registration cards, could remain in Pakistan till the end of this year. Because the political tensions have increased between Kabul and Islamabad, concerns have been raised that Pakistan may mistreat Afghan refugees. Currently more than one million registered and over 700,000 unregistered Afghan refugees live in Pakistan. UNHCR earlier had announced that the process of returning Afghan refugees from Pakistan will start from the 1st of March.

- Watchdog Slams Pakistan, UN Refugee Agency Over Forced Returns

Human Rights Watch said on 13 February 2017 morning that Pakistani authorities have carried out a campaign of abuses and threats to drive out nearly 600,000 Afghans since July 2016. In a report issued on Monday, HRW said the returnees include 365,000 registered refugees, making it the world's largest mass forced return of refugees in recent years. They now face spiralling armed conflict, violence, destitution, and displacement in Afghanistan.

The report, "Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity: The Mass Forced Return of Afghan Refugees," documents Pakistan's abuses and the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in promoting the exodus. Through enhancing its "voluntary repatriation" program and failing to publicly call for an end to coercive practices, the UN agency has become complicit in Pakistan's mass refugee abuse. The UN and international donors should press Pakistan to end the abuses, protect the remaining 1.1 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and allow refugees among the other estimated 750,000 unregistered Afghans there to seek protection, Human Rights Watch said. Gerry Simpson, senior refugee researcher at Human Rights Watch and author of the report said: "After decades of hosting Afghan refugees, Pakistan in mid-2016 unleashed the world's largest recent anti-refugee crackdowns to coerce their mass return."<sup>47</sup>

- Ghani calls on Taliban to return to Afghanistan and live with dignity

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has called on Taliban group leaders to return to Afghanistan and live in the country with dignity. In his speech during a gathering to mark the 28th anniversary of the Soviet forces withdrawal, President Ghani said the Taliban group members who are having an independent and an Afghan mindset should return to Afghanistan and start a dignified life.

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<sup>46</sup> "Afghan Refugees Remain in Pakistan Extended To End Of 2017", *Tolonews*, 17 February 2017, URL: <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghan-refugees-remain-pakistan-extended-end-2017> accessed on 18 February 2017.

<sup>47</sup> *Tolo News*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/watchdog-slams-pakistan-un-refugee-agency-over-forced-returns>

President Ghani further added that the signing of peace agreement with Hezb-e-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has paved the way for the return of Mujahideen to the country. He said the Afghans waged Jihad for the freedom of the country in the past but the current Jihad is for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country.

Questioning the approach of the militants in their so-called holy war, Ghani said the Mujahideen were not conducting suicide attacks and there was no news regarding the destruction of the mosques and killing of the innocent people.<sup>48</sup>

- NATO Mission In Afghanistan Is To Fight Terrorism: Stoltenberg

Speaking ahead of a defense ministers meeting in Brussels, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg has said that the alliance is committed to combating terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and will not allow Afghanistan to become a safe haven for them. NATO's mission and presence in Afghanistan is aimed at combating terrorist groups operating there, said Stoltenberg. Meanwhile, the UN has said that the terrorists waging war against the Afghan people are getting political, moral and financial support from outside the country.

"The purpose of that operation is to fight terrorism. The reason why we are in Afghanistan is to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for international terrorists and there are many different international terrorist groups today in Afghanistan," said Stoltenberg. NATO is expected to convene its defense ministers meeting in Brussels on 15 February 2017 where the alliance will discuss the overall security situation in the world including the situation in Afghanistan.

"The reason why we decided to continue to stay in Afghanistan with 13,000 troops to train, assist and advise the Afghan national army and security forces is to enable them to fight terrorism is to enable them to stabilize their own country," Stoltenberg said. Amid the controversy over Pakistan's double standard policy on terrorism, Pakistan's permanent envoy to the UN Maleeha Lodhi said that the terrorists were forced out of Pakistan during 'Zarb-e-Azb operation'.<sup>49</sup>

- Roots of Ongoing Violence in Afghanistan Lie Outside, Afghan Envoy Tells UNSC

The roots of ongoing violence in Afghanistan lie outside the country, the Afghan envoy to the United Nations said during a meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Nazifullah Salarzai Minister, Deputy Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, was speaking during the meeting "Threats Caused by Terrorist Acts – Protection of Critical Infrastructure".

"The ongoing cycle of violence in Afghanistan is not, by any means, a homegrown phenomenon. Its roots lie elsewhere, outside Afghanistan," Salarzai said. Salarzai

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<sup>48</sup> *Khaama Press*, February 14, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/ghani-calls-on-taliban-to-return-to-afghanistan-and-live-with-dignity-02880>

<sup>49</sup> *Tolo News*, February 14, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/nato-mission-afghanistan-fight-global-terror-stoltenber>

further added the roots of violence are emanating from a strategic design crafted from within our region to advance an ill-fated political agenda, which serves no one, defies international law and constitutes a blatant violation of the very spirit and tenets of the UN Charter, including relevant counterterrorism resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council. According to Salarzai, the fight against international terrorism stands at a crossroads.<sup>50</sup>

- Six Nation Talks in Moscow Ponder Afghanistan Crisis

A renewed attempt at finding a peaceful end to the lingering unrest in conflict-ridden Afghanistan held in Moscow on 15 February 2017, the Russian foreign ministry has announced. The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has said that the consultative meeting on Afghanistan in Moscow is a positive step in promoting regional cooperation and solidarity in the war against terrorism. Moscow has hosted at least two meetings on Afghanistan in less than two months in a bid to bring the much-awaited Afghan peace negotiation process between the government and the Taliban group back on track. The Taliban has long continued its armed struggle against the central government in Kabul.

The six nations talks include representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, India, China and Iran where they will discuss the situation in Afghanistan. Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has said that high-level delegations from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Iran and India are currently holding discussions in Moscow and details of the diplomacy will be soon shared. "Moscow is currently hosting consultations on Afghanistan involving senior officials of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Iran and India and we will be brief you on the outcome of this meeting," said Zakharova.<sup>51</sup>

- Afghan parliament elections timetable likely to be announced in March

The timetable for the parliament election of Afghanistan is likely to be announced by early March of this year. Deputy presidential spokesman Shah Hussain Murtazvi said the Independent Election Commission should present the timetable for the parliamentary election by early March. He said a meeting was also organized with the international donors to discuss the arrangement of funds for the elections.

Murtazvi further added that the United Nations will also support the government and is working on technical team to cooperate with the electoral bodies. The Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC) announced the schedule for the parliamentary and district councils elections earlier last year. The elections date scheduled for 15th October was announced by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) Chief Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani during a press conference in Kabul today.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Daily Outlook Afghaistan*, February 15, 2017, [http://outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=17445](http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=17445) v

<sup>51</sup> *Tolo News*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/six-nation-talks-moscow-ponder-afghanistan-crisis>

<sup>52</sup> *Khaama Press*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/afghan-parliament-elections-timetable-likely-to-be-announced-in-march-02902>



- Pakistan closes routes with Afghanistan after deadly attacks

Pakistan has closed all routes along the Durand Line with Afghanistan following a series of deadly attacks across the country. The Pakistani military officials announced the closure of the routes late on 16 February 2017 night after a deadly suicide attack ripped through a shrine in Sindh province. Director General of the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of Pakistani military, Major General Asif Ghafoor, informed regarding the decision by the Pakistani military.

In a tweet post on Thursday, Gen. Ghafoor said "Pakistan-Afghanistan Border is closed with immediate effects till further orders due to security reasons." The incident at Sehwan city of Sindh took place on 16 February 2017 as hundreds of people had gathered for a ritual. According to the Pakistani government officials, at least 70 people, including women and children were killed in the attack.<sup>53</sup>

- Pakistan army summons Afghan diplomats, demand actions against 76 terrorists

The Pakistani military has reportedly summoned some of the Afghan diplomats following a series of deadly attacks across Pakistan, claiming that 76 terrorists are involved in the attacks using the Afghan soil. "Afg Embassy officials called in GHQ. Given list of 76 Terrorists hiding in Afghanistan. Asked to take immediate action / be handed over to Pakistan," DG ISPR Major General Asif Ghafoor said in a Twitter post.

Earlier, the Pakistani military announced that the routes linking the two countries along the Durand Line have been closed after the attacks. Gen. Ghafoor said "Pakistan-Afghanistan Border closed with immediate effects till further orders due to security reasons." The incident at Sehwan city of Sindh took place on 16 February 2017 evening as hundreds of people had gathered for a ritual. According to the Pakistani government officials, at least 70 people, including women and children were killed in the attack.<sup>54</sup>

- Afghanistan reacts at Pakistan terror attacks and Pak officials allegations

The Afghan government has said the regional countries specifically Afghanistan and Pakistan should reach to an agreement for complete elimination of all terror groups without making any distinction. The Office of the President, ARG Palace, said the terrorist groups are posing serious threats to the region. According to a statement by ARG, a comprehensive document was prepared during the Quadrilateral Coordination Group in fight against terrorism, insisting that the growing threats reflects the need that Pakistan should implement the articles of the document.

The group had agreed to act against all militant and terrorist groups pursuing violence in Afghanistan but no breakthrough was achieved after Taliban opted to continue to its insurgency with the Afghan officials saying the leadership council of the group is

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<sup>53</sup> *Khaama Press*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/pakistan-closes-routes-with-afghanistan-after-deadly-attacks-02905>

<sup>54</sup> *Khaama Press*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/pakistan-army-summons-afghan-diplomats-demand-actions-against-76-terrorists-02906>

based in Peshawar and Quetta cities of Pakistan. This comes as the Pakistani military summoned some of the Afghan diplomats following a series of deadly attacks across Pakistan, claiming that 76 terrorists are involved in the attacks using the Afghan soil. "Afghan Embassy officials called in GHQ. Given list of 76 Ts hiding in Afghanistan. Asked to take immediate action / be handed over to Pakistan," DG ISPR Major General Asif Ghafoor said in a Twitter post.<sup>55</sup>

- Taliban Envoys Barred from Entering UAE

The United Arab Emirates has barred two Taliban members who wanted to attend the prayer ceremony for the late UAE ambassador to Kabul, Juma Mohammed Abdullah al-Kaabi, from entering Abu Dhabi. The UAE ambassador died of injuries sustained in an attack in Kandahar province last month. Media reports indicate that the two Taliban representatives, Mullah Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai and Mawlawi Madaniwere, were assigned by the Taliban's Qatar office to attend the prayer ceremony of the ambassador.

"Behind the most of the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan are Taliban. The group is a threat to the regional countries and the world. We hope all the countries increase pressure on Taliban," Sediq Sediqqi, spokesman of the Ministry of Interior said. The two envoys were also assigned to deny the Taliban's involvement in the Kandahar attack, reports have indicated. The UAE government however refused the two Taliban members entry into the country, reports added.<sup>56</sup>

- Ghani suggests isolation of countries using terrorism as instrument of state policy

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani suggested the isolation of the countries using terrorism as an instrument of state policy in a bid to eliminate the menace of terrorism. Speaking during the Munich Security Conference, President Ghani said the support offered by countries to terrorism, weakening of the nations, and corruption are the main issues that further enable the terror groups to expand their activities.

He said it is important that the countries which are using terrorism as an instrument of state policy to achieve their targets should be isolated. President Ghani further added that Afghanistan is facing terrorism in the frontline and is currently engaged in battling around 20 terrorist groups, emphasizing that the ongoing war against terrorism is not only aimed at the freedom of Afghanistan but is waged for the global security. According to President Ghani, terrorism does not recognize boundaries and no region will remain safe from the menace of terrorism.<sup>57</sup>

- Qatar office should be shut if Taliban stay away from talks: President Ghani

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<sup>55</sup> *Khaama Press*, February 18, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/afghanistan-reacts-at-pakistan-terror-attacks-and-pak-officials-allegations-02910>

<sup>56</sup> *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 18, 2017, [http://outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=17465](http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=17465)

<sup>57</sup> *Khaama Press*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/ghani-suggests-isolation-of-countries-using-terrorism-as-instrument-of-state-policy-02919>

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has said the Taliban office in Qatar should be closed if the group pursues violence. During a meeting with the Qatar foreign minister, President Ghani said sanctions should also be applied on the group if no breakthrough was made in bring the leaders of the group to negotiations table.

He said the main priority is that the group abandon violence and participate in peace process. President Ghani further added that the findings of the Afghan government reveals the group was involved in Kandahar attack which was plotted by the group's leadership council. In his turn, Qatar's foreign minister said there is no justification for violence and his government is committed to continue to its efforts to help bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. Dozens of people were killed or wounded after an explosive device planted in a government compound went off in Kandahar city last month.<sup>58</sup>

## नेपाल

भारत ने काठमांडू से दिल्ली और कोलकाता से रेल सम्पर्क का प्रस्ताव रखा:

भारत ने काठमांडू के साथ दो शहरों दिल्ली और कोलकाता के साथ रेल संपर्क स्थापित करने का प्रस्ताव पेश किया है। रेल मंत्री सुरेश प्रभाकर काठमांडू में भा . इससे सीमा पार संपर्कता और लोगों को आवाजाही में मदद मिलेगी . प्रभु ने एक बैठक के दौरान कहा कि इन दो रेल मार्गों के बनने से दोनों देशों के मध्य संपर्कता और ज्यादा बढ़ेगी<sup>59</sup>

एमाले मधेशी और दलित के पक्ष में: ओली

एमाले के मुखिया के पी शर्मा ओली ने राजधानी में अपने दल के एक कार्यक्रम के दौरान कहा कि वे देश की अखंडता और संप्रभुता को अक्षुण्ण रखते हुए नागरिकों के अधिकारों को सुरक्षित रखना चाहते हैं उन्होंने कहा कि उनका दल . मधेशियों और गरीबों , दलितोंके पक्ष में है लेकिन कुछ दल देश में ऐसा भ्रम फैला रहे हैं कि हम इनके खिलाफ हैं.<sup>60</sup>

राष्ट्रपति ने नेताओं से चुनाव पर केन्द्रित होने को कहा:

नेपाल की राष्ट्रपति बिद्य देवी भंडारी ने सभी नेताओं और देश के प्रमुख दलों से कहा कि संविधान के सही रूप से लागू होने के लिए सभी को चुनावों की तैयारी में लग जाना चाहिए राष्ट्रपति ने कहा कि यह एक निर्णायक समय है और . सभी दलों को एकजुट होकर इस दिशा में कार्य करना चाहिये<sup>61</sup>

प्रधानमंत्री ने स्थानीय चुनावों पर मधेशी नेताओं से बातचीत की:

प्रधानमंत्री पुष्प कमल दहल ने गुरुवार को मधेश के नेताओं से आगामी स्थानीय चुनावों को लेकर बातचीत की . राजेन्द्र महतो से मिले और कहा कि ऐसा माहौल बनाये कि आगामी चुनावों की प्रधानमंत्री सद्भावना पार्टी के अध्यक्ष . इसके आलावा प्रधानमंत्री ने चुनावों में सहयोग करने की बात भी कही . तिथि घोषित की जा सके<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *The Pashtun Times*, February 19, 2017, <http://thepashtuntimes.com/qatar-office-to-be-shut-if-taliban-stay-away-from-talks-president-ghani/>

<sup>59</sup> "India proposes Kathmandu to Delhi, Kolkata rail links", *The Kathmandu Post*, 19 February 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-02-20/1>

<sup>60</sup> UML in favor of Madheshi and dalit: Oli", *The Rising Nepal*, 12 February 2017, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2017-02-12/bdf74e82917e000c522c5ec70c3ebeebeeb.jpg>

<sup>61</sup> "President asks leaders to focus on elections", *The Rising Nepal*, 14 February 2017, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2017-02-14/6177d7866fb96ad5aa6c005a8b6baf69.jpg>

<sup>62</sup> "PM consults with Madheshi leaders on local elections", *The Rising Nepal*, 17 February 2017, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2017-02-17/cd2ab42814f0d7265e95e1e4363c9621.jpg>

नेपाल और चीन के रिश्ते क्रमिक रूप से बढ़ रहे हैं राजदूत यू :

नेपाल में चीन के राजदूत यू हांग ने कहा कि पिछले कुछ सालों में दोनों पड़ोसी देशों के द्विपक्षीय संबंधों में विकास हुआ है उन्होंने आगे कहा कि नेपाल और चीन पड़ोसी देश हैं जो कि पहाड़ों और नदियों से जुड़े हुए हैं अभी हाल के , व्यापार और संस्कृति के सहयोग , कआर्थि , वर्षों में द्विपक्षीय संबंधों में बढ़ोतरी हुई है तथा हमारे सम्बन्ध राजनीति .पर निर्भर है<sup>63</sup>

नेपाल की समीक्षा करने वाले कूटनीतिज्ञों में रंजीत जी का स्थान सबसे ऊँचा है अनिल झा :

भारतीय राजदूत महामहिम रंजीत राय जी से मेरी पहली मुलाकात दिल्ली में हुई थी, जब वे विदेश मन्त्रालय में नेपाल डेस्क में सेवारत थे. इसके पश्चात् जब वे नेपाल के लिए राजदूत बनकर नेपाल आनेवाले थे, तो उस समय भी दिल्ली में मुलाकात हुई थी. मुलाकात के दौरान नेपाल के सामाजिक, राजनीतिक और नेपाल-भारत के सम्बन्धों के बारे में घनीभूत रूप में बातचीत हुई थी. नेपाल आने के पश्चात् समसामयिक विषयवस्तुओं पर उनसे हमारी बातें होती रही. सलाह मशविरा भी होता रहा. रंजीत जी एक कुशल कूटनीतिज्ञ हैं. वे नेपाल की राजनीति से पूर्ण रूपेण परिचित हैं

क्योंकि तत्कालीन नेकपा माओवादी और राजनीतिक दलों के बीच दिल्ली में हुए १२ सूत्री सम्झौते के वक्त रंजीत जी भी मौजूद थे, जिसे दिल्ली सम्झौता के नाम से भी जाना जाता है. ध्यातव्य है कि उस समय वे नेपाल डेस्क में सेवारत थे. नेपाल के बारे में उनका विश्लेषण बहुत ही सटीक है. दूसरे देश के नागरिक होकर भी नेपाल के बारे में समीक्षा करनेवाले कूटनीतिज्ञों में उनका स्थान सबसे ऊँचा है. वे नेपाल की राजनीतिक, सामाजिक परिस्थितियों के साथ-साथ यहां के राजनीतिज्ञों के बारे में भी अच्छी तरह से जानकारी रखते हैं . जहां तक नेपाल में विकास निर्माण की बात है, तो मैं कहना चाहूंगा कि जिस समय कुंवर नटवर सिंह भारत के विदेशमंत्री थे, उस समय गजेन्द्र नारायण सिंह के साथ मेरी भी उनसे मुलाकात हुई थी. उस दौरान मैंने नेपाल में संघीय व्यवस्था हो, मुख्यमंत्री का पर्याप्त अधिकार हो और आर्थिक व्यवस्था भी हो, तो १० वर्ष के अंदर मधेश में पूर्ण रूपेण विकास हो जाएगा. ग्यारहवें वर्ष में विकास करने के लिए कुछ रहेगा भी नहीं, आशय यह है कि हमारी पहली आवश्यकता विकास नहीं है. हमारी पहली आवश्यकता है- सम्मान, पहचान और स्वाभिमान. वैसे मधेशी जनता की आवश्यकताएं हैं- रोटी, कपडा और मकान, शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य और रोजगार, शांति, समृद्धि और विकास तथा सम्मान, पहचान और स्वाभिमान. इन आवश्यकताओं में से उन की पहली आवश्यकता है- सम्मान, पहचान और स्वाभिमान । जब उनकी पहचान स्थापित होगी, उनका स्वाभिमान रहेगा तभी उन्हें सम्मान मिलेगा. इसके पश्चात् ही वे रोटी, कपडा और मकान एवं शांति, समृद्धि और विकास की बात सोचेगी. इसलिए भी हम अभी विकास निर्माण में ज्यादा ध्यान नहीं देते हैं.

जहां तक सवाल है भारतीय सहयोग का, तो मेरे ख्याल से नेपाल को सबसे ज्यादा सहयोग करनेवाला देश भारत ही है. नेपाल के सभी इलाकों में भारत का सहयोग रहा है. खास तौर पर मैं पहाड़ी जनता के विकास का विरोधी नहीं हूं. मैं तो सिर्फ मधेशी जनता को अन्य जनता के अधिकार के बराबरी के पक्ष में हूं. इसलिए कि अधिकार में समानता होने के बाद विकास अवश्य हो जाएगा. विकास के मामले में नेपाल की अन्य जनता से भी मैं उतना ही जिम्मेदार मानूंगा . जबकि मधेशियों के अधिकार में कटौती की गई है. उनके अधिकार को हरण किया गया है, इसलिए मैं यह बात बोलता हूं, भारत नेपाल का सबसे बड़ा विकास पार्टनर देश रहा है इसलिए हिमाल, पहाड़ व मधेश के सभी क्षेत्रों में भारत से जो भी सहयोग हो रहा है, उसमें समानता है और होना भी चाहिए क्योंकि भारत पूरे नेपाल का मित्र है. अंत में मैं कहना चाहूंगा कि महामहिम रंजीत जी का कार्यकाल हरेक दृष्टिकोण से सन्तोषजनक रहा है. अब जो भी

<sup>63</sup> "Nepal-China relations developing steadily: Ambassador Yu", The Rising Nepal, 17 February 2017, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2017-02-17/cd86bcc79dafb85d0b6b951eac9f91b5.jpg>

राजदूत आएंगे वे हमारे मित्र होंगे. हम मित्रवत् व्यवहार करेंगे और उनसे भी हम मित्रवत् व्यवहार की अपेक्षा रखेंगे.<sup>64</sup>

## Pakistan

- Tehmina Janjua Foreign Secretary: Senior diplomat Tehmina Janjua on February 13<sup>th</sup> became the first woman to have been appointed foreign secretary in Pakistan. She will assume the post of foreign secretary in the first week of March 2017. Janjua would replace the incumbent Aizaz Chaudhry, who has been posted as ambassador to the United States. She has been picked ahead of a number of senior officers. Janjua has been serving as ambassador and Pakistan's permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva since October 2015. She previously worked as ambassador to Italy from December 2011 to October 2015. Her experience has predominantly been in multilateral diplomacy serving in the UN — both at New York and Geneva.<sup>65</sup>
- Pakistan Maritime Security: Defence Minister Khawaja Moham-mad Asif on February 13<sup>th</sup> stressed the need for improved maritime security for the smooth flow of routes in the Arabia Sea after completion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Gwadar port. He was speaking at the closing ceremony of the 7th International Maritime Conference organised by National Centre for Maritime Policy Research.<sup>66</sup> Strengthening the effort, the 37 nation naval exercise Aman 2017 came to a closure on February 14<sup>th</sup>. Dignitaries who attended the closing ceremony included Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Pm Sharif stated that Aman 2017 was a manifestation of Pakistan's policy of constructive engagement with the comity of nations for peace and stability in the maritime commons. Aman-2017 was conducted in two phases — the harbour phase spanned from Feb 11 to 12 and the sea phase was from Feb 13 to 14. The harbour phase comprised the international maritime conference, seminars, talks, cross ships visits, call ons, an international band display and a maritime counter terrorism demonstration whereas the sea phase included the practical execution of operational plans and activities finalised during the harbour phase.<sup>67</sup>
- Terrorism and Arabic Learning: Members of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Cabinet Secretariat, while debating the Compulsory Education

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<sup>64</sup> अनिल झा ,नेपाल की समीक्षा करने वाले कूटनीतिज्ञों में रंजीत जी का स्थान सबसे ऊँचा है 21, हिमालिनी ,अनिल झा :फरवरी २०१७.  
<http://www.himalini.com>

<sup>65</sup> “Tehmina first woman to become foreign secy”, *Dawn*, February 14, 2017,  
<http://www.dawn.com/news/1314728>

<sup>66</sup> “Minister calls for improved maritime security”, *Dawn*, February 14, 2017,  
<http://www.dawn.com/news/1314712/minister-calls-for-improved-maritime-security>

<sup>67</sup> Shazia Hasan, “37-nation naval exercise draws to impressive finish”, *Dawn*, February 15, 2017,  
<http://www.dawn.com/news/1314860/37-nation-naval-exercise-draws-to-impressive-finish>

of Arabic Bill 2015, discussed whether the lack of Arabic as a subject in the curriculum was the cause of terrorism in Pakistan. The bill was moved by MNA Naeema Kishwar Khan.<sup>68</sup>

- Response to Terrorist Attacks: After the devastating terrorist attack in Sehwan on February 16<sup>th</sup>, the civilian and military leadership pledged that they would go to any extent to protect the nation. The prime minister directed state institutions to mobilise all resources for rescue and relief after the terrorist attack. The ISPR quoted Army Chief Bajwa as saying that recent acts of terrorism were being executed on directions from hostile powers and from sanctuaries in Afghanistan.<sup>69</sup> The Foreign Office on February 16<sup>th</sup> said that Afghanistan had been asked to address concerns about presence of Pakistani terrorist groups on its soil, which are believed to be behind the latest wave of terrorism in the country. The issue was taken up with the Afghan Deputy Head of Mission because the responsibility for the Lahore terrorist attack was claimed by Jamaat-ul-Ahrrar, which is based in Afghanistan.<sup>70</sup> Pakistan has also started shelling alleged terrorist camps inside Afghanistan, even after reported breach of sovereignty claims by the Afghan leadership. The number of the suspected militants belonging to the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) killed in the past two days increased to 37 with many of their camps destroyed. Till the time of writing, media reported the suspected death of 57 militants in the alleged camps that Pakistan has been shelling in Afghanistan. The Pakistan military had asked the Afghan government to either take action against the 76 terrorists hiding across the border or hand them over after the Sehwan terrorist attack.<sup>71</sup> Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan on February 18<sup>th</sup> blamed “external powers and their intelligence agencies” for the latest wave of terrorism that is sweeping the country. He also alleged the role of some Afghan refugees in being part of the directly or indirectly.<sup>72</sup> He further added that those who targeted innocent people, whether they were inside the country or came from foreign lands would not be spared.<sup>73</sup> Fighter

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<sup>68</sup> Ikram Junaidi, “‘Terrorism increasing because children are not taught Arabic’”, *Dawn*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1314975>

<sup>69</sup> “Civilian, military leaders vow to protect nation”, *Dawn*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315245>

<sup>70</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Concern about presence of terror groups in Afghanistan conveyed to Kabul, says FO”, *Dawn*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315241>

<sup>71</sup> “Pakistan army pounds more border hideouts”, *Dawn*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315660>; Ibrahim Shinwari, “More militants killed on border”, *Dawn*, February 20, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315864/more-militants-killed-on-border>

<sup>72</sup> Iftikhar A. Khan, “Nisar blames ‘foreign powers’ for terror attacks”, *Dawn*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315666>

<sup>73</sup> “We will hunt terrorists in, outside the country: Nisar”, *The Express Tribune*, February 19, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1331888/gloves-off-will-hunt-terrorists-outside-country-nisar/>

jets of the Pakistan Air Force have claimed to have bombed a number of terrorists who were trying to regroup in the North Waziristan Agency.<sup>74</sup>

- Polio and Pakistan: A four years old minor boy from Lodhran has tested positive for polio, health authorities describe it the first such case of 2017 in Punjab. No polio case was reported in the province in 2016.<sup>75</sup>
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Chinese Language: The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government has started offering free of charge Chinese-language courses for the youth in five technical institutions to enable them to secure a job in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The provincial government took the initiative after talks between Chief Minister Pervaiz Khattak and a Chinese delegation. Initially, two Chinese-language classes have been started in a number of institutions, with one skilled teacher hired in each. Chinese officials have assured the K-P CM people from the province will be hired towards this end.<sup>76</sup>

## Maldives

(Dr. M. Samatha)

- India has a moral obligation to ensure fair polls in Maldives: Former President Nasheed

Former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed has urged India to ensure that free and fair elections take place in his country in 2018, as he prepares to contest polls again. Nasheed, who recently visited Colombo to meet his party leaders and workers, told TOI that India had a 'moral obligation' to ensure inclusive elections in the archipelago. "We believe that India has a moral obligation to facilitate inclusive, free and fair elections in the Maldives," he said. "India must build the necessary leverages to make it happen. We know that India can do it," added Nasheed, who was deposed in a coup in 2012.

Even as he continues to live in exile in London, Nasheed and his Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) continue to hold promise of pro-India governance in the strategically located country in the Indian Ocean which has been flooded by loans and grants from China. While India has made its peace with the Abdulla Yameen government, New Delhi remains anxious about political instability and growing

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<sup>74</sup> "Air strikes target terrorists regrouping in NWA; several dead", *The Express Tribune*, February 20, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1332074/nearly-dozen-militants-killed-kurram-agency-encounter/>

<sup>75</sup> Majeed Gill, "Polio resurfaces in south Punjab", *Dawn*, February 18, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315453>

<sup>76</sup> Asad Zia, "K-P govt offering free Chinese language courses", *The Express Tribune*, February 19, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1331870/k-p-govt-offering-free-chinese-language-courses-2/>

radicalisation in the country. Maldives' embrace of China as its main development partner too remains a major source of concern for India in its neighbourhood.

Maldives continues to express commitment to what it describes as its 'India first' policy but it remains the only country in SAARC which PM Narendra Modi hasn't visited yet. In fact, Modi cancelled his visit to Male in 2015 because of political turmoil there. Nasheed's call for support from India comes at a time when his party is feeling increasingly let down by what some of its leaders describe as India's reluctance to play the role of a leader in the region. "If India's going to abdicate its leadership role in the region, it must prepare itself to contend with a muscular China in its neighbourhood," said an MDP leader and a close aide of Nasheed.

"We have reasons to believe that the Yameen government may not allow elections to take place at all. India has to work with international community to ensure that polls are conducted and then that these are free and fair," added the leader and Nasheed aide. However, as it looks at expanding Chinese presence in Indian Ocean with wariness, India has tended more to strategic aspects of its ties with Maldives in the recent past. This manifested in its signing of an agreement for enhanced defence cooperation with the Yameen government last year. India cannot abandon Maldives, no matter who wins election there. Maldives people are equally important as their leaders.

Nasheed was sentenced to prison for 13 years in 2015 on, according to his party, trumped-up charges of terrorism. The Yameen government was accused of acting in a 'politically motivated manner' in facilitating the terror case against Nasheed who travelled to UK last year for medical treatment and was granted asylum there. As he said in his press conference in Colombo, Nasheed is willing to return to Maldives but he fears that anybody willing to contest elections might be arrested by the Yameen regime. While the government has said that it is open to dialogue with the opposition, its position on likely Nasheed candidature remains ambiguous.<sup>77</sup>

- Geneva Summit to present "Courageous Award" to jailed ex-pres

Jailed Former President Mohamed Nasheed is to receive the "Courageous Award" at this year's Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy. Organised by the UN Watch jointly with 20 NGOs worldwide, the summit will be held in Geneva, Switzerland on the eve of the United Nations Human Rights Council's annual sit-down. The Courageous Award will be presented to Nasheed on 21<sup>st</sup> February. Nasheed is also the appointed leader for this year's summit, which will address current issues of human rights around the world. A joint press statement released by the organizations earlier described Nasheed as the world's most popular anti-government activist and political prisoner.

Joining Nasheed at the summit to "demand that the 34th UN Human Rights Council session address the world's most dire human rights situations" are several other

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<sup>77</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-has-a-moral-obligation-to-ensure-fair-polls-in-maldives-former-president-nasheed/articleshow/57236239.cms>



political activists including recently-released political prisoners and representatives of jailed prisoners. Prominent figures include Nyima Lhamo, an escaped Tibetan activist, Zhanna Nemtsova, a journalist and daughter of former Russian Prime Minister Boris Nemstov who was assassinated for dissidence, Can Dundar, an activist journalist targeted by the Turkish government, and Anastasia Zotova, an activist and wife of jailed Russian dissident Ildar Dadin. Subjects on the program this year include discrimination against women, jailing of journalists, prison camps, Internet freedom, religious intolerance, and the persecution of human rights defenders.

Nasheed, who is sentenced to thirteen years in jail on terrorism charges for the arbitrary detention of a judge during his administration, has been living in the United Kingdom under political asylum for over a year. He visited the United States last month to take part in climate change talks, and recently stayed in Sri Lanka for a fortnight to meet with top officials of the Maldives' opposition, diplomats and foreign ambassadors.<sup>78</sup>

## Sri Lanka

(Dr. M. Samatha)

- Army Takes On CBK over Sexual Abuse Allegations

The Army has categorically refuted the statement made by former President Chandrika Kumaratunga over her allegations that there was widespread sexual exploitation by the army against Tamil women in the former war torn areas. In a statement, the Army Headquarters said that it noted with 'dismay' on the utterance made by Kumaratunga, who is also the head of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation. "The Army categorically denies the same as a baseless allegation," the statement said. The army has also warned that such 'baseless' assertions will only jeopardize the reconciliation process.

Last week, Kumaratunga said that Tamil women who survived the war were facing widespread sexual exploitation by the army, and others. "There is a lot of sexual abuse still going on by officials, even Tamil officials and even at lower levels, the grama sevakas (village officials)," she told Sri Lanka's Foreign Correspondents' Association. "Even to sign a document, they abuse the women and of course some people in the (armed) forces" continue to commit sexual abuse, she said.

However, the Army pointed out that in 2010, civil administration was firmly established in the North and the Army withdrew from all forms of civil administration. Since then, the Army has not been involved in administration concerning civilians, and the question of sexual exploitation and abuses during the said process does not hence arise. "Regrettably, the author of this statement has made unsubstantiated and

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<sup>78</sup> <http://en.mihaaru.com/geneva-summit-to-present-courageous-award-to-jailed-ex-pres/>

baseless assertions without specifying any incident of sexual exploitation or abuse," the statement said.

"The Army wishes to place on record that it has a Zero Tolerance Policy on sexual abuses as evidenced in Premawathi Manamperi case in 1971, Krishanthi Kumaraswamy case and Rajini Vellaydunpillai case that took place during the period 1995-2005. In all these instances, the Army fully cooperated with the civil court cases against the accused who were on trial, resulting in death penalty," the statement said.

The statement also added that the Army always takes stern action on Army personnel against whom ex facie cases have been and discharged summarily from the Army despite acquittal/pending action in civil courts. "It shall continue to pursue this policy," the statement added.<sup>79</sup>

- More than 1200 tri forces deserters arrested

Sri Lanka Police together with the Sri Lanka Corps of Military Police (SLCMP) are currently conducting island-wide raids to arrest tri forces personnel who are considered as Absent without Official Leave (AWOL). Speaking to the Ministry of Defence Media, Military Spokesman Brigadier Roshan Seneviratne said that around 1,300 tri forces deserters have been arrested till Monday (13th Feb.) from midnight 31st December 2016.

Further speaking the Military Spokesman stated that 984 army, 236 navy, and 14 air force AWOL personnel have been arrested to date. He also pointed out that, around 42,800 tri forces deserters (including officers) who have not reported for duty so far and legal actions will be taken against them.

The Ministry of Defence declared two General Amnesty periods last year, providing the opportunity to tri forces personnel who are considered as AWOL to obtain legal discharge. The previous General Amnesty period ended on 31st December 2016 and during that period, 34 officers and 8,843 other ranks reported to their respective services seeking legal discharge.<sup>80</sup>

- War Crimes Probe: TNA Miffed With Government's Time Buying Tactics

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is miffed with the government's latest time buying tactic in its attempt to further postpone the war crimes probe, sources said. During several forums, the TNA MPs, including its leader R. Sampanthan had expressed both disappointment and annoyance following the government's recent declaration that it will seek more time from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to probe war crimes. The TNA which has from time to time both directly and indirectly supported the Yahapalanaya government, has also been 'upset' by a recent statement made by former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga that a war crimes probe was not necessary. Kumaratunga, is the head of the Office for the National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR).

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<sup>79</sup> <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/army-takes-on-cbk-over-sexual-abuse-allegations/>

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/15909-more-than-1200-tri-forces-deserters-arrested>

Meanwhile, Sampanthan who is also the leader of the opposition in parliament has accused the government of trying to evade its responsibilities by buying time from the UNHRC. He had also reportedly said that if the Sri Lankan government seeks for more time at the UNHRC sessions in Geneva this month, then the UN must monitor and scrutinize the government's activities 'more closely' to ensure they are genuinely working towards fulfilling its pledge, or was looking at ways of stalling the probe.

Last week, foreign minister Mangala Samaraweera said that he will seek for more time from the UNHRC session this month, to probe war crime charges. He had assured that this government will not go back on its pledge, but instead needed more time to set up the judicial mechanisms, to probe war crimes committed during the final stages of the war between the military and the LTTE. The 34th UNHRC sessions will commence on February 27 in Geneva.

Just before Samaraweera's statement, ex-President Kumaratunga who is also a very close associate of incumbent President Maithripala Sirisena ruled out the involvement of courts to probe war crimes. Kumaratunga, said that as steps have been taken to create a Constitution and to establish the Office of the Missing Persons, there won't be a necessity to have courts to probe war crimes, thereby going back on an original pledge by the government that it will probe war crimes, in an effort to bring in holistic reconciliation.<sup>81</sup>

- BJP weighing up 'political split' in Rajapaksa camp?

Even as Sri Lanka's former President Mahinda Rajapaksa angles for a political comeback, New Delhi appears to be weighing up possible political shifts in the island, including a split in the Rajapaksa camp, the Hindu reported. On February 10, BJP national general secretary Ram Madhav, known to be Prime Minister Narendra Modi's point man on Sri Lanka, met President Maithripala Sirisena and PM Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo, a week before Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar's scheduled official visit.

Mr. Madhav also met a few other key political actors, The Hindu learns, and reportedly discussed political options that might "neutralise" former strongman Rajapaksa. Confirming that he met the President and the Prime Minister to discuss bilateral issues and a forthcoming Indian Ocean conference in the island, Mr. Madhav, when contacted in New Delhi, said "the [other] allegations are false". While he categorically denied having discussed the former first family in any of his meetings, political sources in Colombo told The Hindu that the BJP's key strategist seemed to explore the possibility of Gotabaya Rajapaksa decamping from Mahinda Rajapaksa in return for high political office.

One of Sri Lanka's most controversial figures and brother of the ex-President, Mr. Gotabaya was prominent in the leadership to defeat the LTTE, playing a key role as Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development. Currently facing

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<sup>81</sup> <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/war-crimes-probe-tna-miffed-with-governments-time-buying-tactics/>

corruption charges for allegedly transferring state-owned weapons to a private firm, causing a loss of nearly \$75 million to the country, he has been a staunch critic of the government's reconciliation strategy. While Mr. Madhav's reported enquiries about him have raised eyebrows in political circles, its timing is also significant.

Two years after coming to power, Sri Lanka's national unity government — formed by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) that President Sirisena leads and its rival United National Party with PM Wickremesinghe at the helm — is pulling apart. Amid mounting criticism over the government's delay in delivering its key election promises, coupled with looming corruption charges, the government is facing another immediate task for its survival — managing the ex-President, who leads a faction of the SLFP. This political grouping is challenging virtually every move of the government as a "joint opposition" in Parliament.

Meanwhile, Mr. Rajapaksa has become increasingly vocal in his criticism of India. Observing that New Delhi has been "mouse-like" on the current government's China policy, while it objected to his, the former President has accused India of plotting his defeat in the January 2015 elections. Even as Colombo tries to iron out issues with Beijing on a massive port and investment zone being built with Chinese assistance, Mr. Rajapaksa went to China in late 2016 on an invitation from the government. At the same time, Colombo-New Delhi ties improved visibly with Mr. Modi's visit to the neighbouring country in 2015, the first bilateral visit by an Indian Prime Minister in nearly three decades.

India and Sri Lanka are currently negotiating a trade deal and exploring partnerships in the strategically crucial eastern city of Trincomalee, in addition to collaborating on development projects. Mr. Madhav is a frequent visitor to Colombo and a known emissary of Mr. Modi. Foreign Secretary Mr. Jaishankar, who arrives on Saturday for a two-day visit, will meet the Sri Lankan President, Prime Minister and other key political actors.<sup>82</sup>

## West Asia

### Israel

- President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu: PM Netanyahu met President Donald Trump in Washington on February 15<sup>th</sup>. While urging Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to curb settlement construction, he dropped a U.S. commitment to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Trump vowed to work toward a peace deal between Israel and Palestinians but said it would require compromise on both sides, leaving it up to the parties themselves ultimately to decide on the terms of any agreement. Netanyahu insisted that Jewish settlements were "not the core of the conflict"

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<sup>82</sup> <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/BJP-weighting-up-political-split-in-Rajapaksa-camp--124067.html>

and made no public commitment to reduce settlement building in the occupied West Bank. Trump echoed Netanyahu's calls for Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state – something they have refused to do – and to halt incitement against Israelis. But even as Trump promised to pursue peace, saying "it might be a bigger and better deal than people in this room even understand," he made no effort to address the deep distrust and other obstacles that have prevented any substantive negotiations since 2014.<sup>83</sup>

- Saudi Arabia and Israel: Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir, said that he is optimistic that Arabs and Israelis can reach a peace deal in 2017. While addressing in the Munich Security Conference on February 19<sup>th</sup> that the contours of an Israeli-Palestinian accord were clear, and that Saudi Arabia and other Arab states would work to bring it to fruition.<sup>84</sup>

## Turkey & Yemen

(Dr. Omair Anas)

- Turkey Envisions Joint Operation With U.S. To Rid Syria Of Isis<sup>85</sup>

Turkey has presented two proposals to the United States for how to carry out a joint military operation to drive the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) from its stronghold in the Syrian city of Raqqa, Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet* reported on Saturday.

Ankara has said repeatedly that the planned operation should be conducted by local Arab forces, possibly with support from Turkish troops, as opposed to the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Force (SDF)—an alliance dominated by Kurdish YPG militia.

Washington's support for the SDF, which launched a campaign to encircle Raqqa in November, has caused tension with NATO-ally Turkey. Ankara views the Kurdish militia as an extension of militants fighting on its own soil.

It is not yet clear whether the new U.S. administration of President Donald Trump will provide weapons to the YPG despite Turkey's objections. The U.S. says arms provided

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<sup>83</sup> Michael Laitman, "The Trump-Netanyahu Meeting and the Chance for Peace", *Haaretz*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/haaretz-labels/laitman/1.772580>; Tovah Lazaroff, "Netanyahu to Trump: Recognize Golan Heights as part of Israel", *The Jerusalem Post*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Netanyahu-to-Trump-Recognize-Golan-Heights-as-part-of-Israel-481676>; Raoul Wootliff, "Netanyahu hails 'a new day' after 'historic' talks with Trump", *The Times of Israel*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-hails-a-new-day-after-historic-talks-with-trump/>; Luke Baker and Matt Spetalnick, "Meeting Israel's Netanyahu, Trump backs away from commitment to Palestinian state", *Reuters*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-israel-idUSKBN15U0GB>

<sup>84</sup> "Praising Trump, Saudi FM urges progress toward peace with Israel", *The Times of Israel*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/praising-trump-saudi-fm-urges-progress-toward-israeli-arab-peace/>

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/turkey-envisions-joint-operation-rid-syria-isis-558341>

to the SDF are so far limited to its Arab elements but Ankara says they are going to Kurdish militia and is asking for a halt.

Speaking during a trip to Germany, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said there would be "serious issues" for ties with the United States if Washington partnered with Kurdish militia for the Raqqa operation against ISIS.

"We've told them one terrorist organization cannot be used to fight another. I believe the new U.S. administration will take these assessments into consideration," he told reporters.

### *Two Road Maps*

In a meeting on Friday at Incirlik air base in southern Turkey, a key hub for the U.S.-led coalition against the jihadists, Turkish military chief Hulusi Akar and his U.S. counterpart Joseph Dunford discussed the two Raqqa road maps, Hurriyet said, citing security sources.

Ankara's preferred plan of action envisages Turkish and U.S. special forces, backed by commandoes and Turkey-backed Syrian rebels entering Syria through the border town of Tel Abyad, currently held by Kurdish YPG militia, the newspaper said.

The forces would cut through YPG territory, before pushing on to Raqqa, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south.

Such a plan would require the United States to convince the Kurdish militia to grant the Turkey-backed forces a 20-kilometre (12-mile)-wide strip through YPG territory, the paper said.

The SDF alliance, which includes Arab and other groups in Syria's north as well as the YPG, controls swathes of territory along the Syria-Turkey border as they push back ISIS.

Yildirim said Turkish forces would not be directly involved in combat but would provide tactical support. Both the Turkish and U.S. military would have a ground presence, he added.

A second alternative outlined by Akar to Dunford was to push toward Raqqa via the Syrian town of Bab, Hurriyet reported, which Turkey-backed forces have been fighting to seize from Islamic State for the past two months.

But the long journey of 180 kilometers (about 110 miles) and mountainous terrain make that possibility less likely, it said.

- Turkey proposed US Special Forces in northern Syria: FM<sup>86</sup>

Turkey proposed that the U.S. should send its own Special Forces to northern Syria to back moderate opposition forces fighting against Daesh, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Sunday.

In his address to the Munich Security Conference, Cavusoglu called on the U.S. and other allies to end their support for the terrorist PKK's Syrian offshoot, PYD, and instead support the moderate opposition forces in a stronger way.

"Two days ago [U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] Gen. [Joseph] Dunford was in Ankara to discuss all these technical issues. Yes, we proposed to the U.S. to put their Special Forces on the ground to support the local moderate forces," he said.

Cavusoglu underlined that the right group to support in the fight against Daesh should be the Syrian moderate opposition forces instead of the PYD/YPG, which are affiliated with the terrorist group PKK seeking an independent state.

"Cooperating with a terrorist organization in our fight against another terrorist organization is very dangerous," he said.

"That is the mistake the previous administration in the U.S. made. They gave weapons to YPG and PKK got some of the weapons. And PKK used those weapons in their terrorist attacks in Turkey," he said.

Cavusoglu highlighted the success of the Syrian moderate opposition forces in the Turkey-led Operation Euphrates Shield in which Free Syrian Army fighters liberated significant areas along the Turkish border from Daesh, including large parts of Al-Bab in Syria's Aleppo province.

"We are about to take back Al-Bab. After Al-Bab, we can take back Raqqah together," he said, referring to the stronghold of the terrorist group Daesh in northern Syria.

The Turkey-led Operation Euphrates Shield began in late August 2016 to improve security, support coalition forces, and eliminate the terror threat along the Turkish border using Free Syrian Army fighters backed by Turkish artillery and jets.

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<sup>86</sup> <http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkey-proposed-us-special-forces-in-northern-syria-fm/753775>

Cavusoglu called on partners from the anti-Daesh international coalition to send their special forces for the planned ground offensive to retake Raqqah.

"Why are we relying on a terrorist organization in our fight?" he asked, referring to the U.S. military's support for the PKK/PYD terror under ex-President Barack Obama's administration, which saw the group as its ground ally against Daesh in Syria.

"We are 65 countries in the coalition against Daesh, and only Turkey has 600,000 troops. Are 65 countries not strong enough, or vigilant enough to defeat one terrorist organization Daesh, and we rely on another terrorist organization?" he asked.

Cavusoglu underlined that PKK/PYD's main interest was not to defeat Daesh, but to gain more territory and to create its own cantons or an independent state.

"We cannot tolerate any terrorist canton or state in the northern part of Syria," he said, reaffirming Ankara's long-standing position.

He recalled reports of ethnic cleansing carried out by PKK/PYD forces in areas captured by the group, and said the PKK affiliated group was not interested at all in peace or securing the unity of Syria.

The Turkish foreign minister also warned against possible sectarian and ethnic tensions, in the case of PKK/PYD forces, or Shia militias joining the Raqqah operation.

On Friday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey's target after liberating Al-Bab, Syria, from Daesh is the town of Manbij, and clearing the terrorist PKK's Syrian offshoot, PYD, from the region.

An upcoming target is Raqqah, a Syrian city on the northeast bank of the Euphrates River.

Erdogan added, "As you know, Raqqah is the most important center for Daesh, so I have told Mr. Donald Trump that we, as coalition forces, are together for the goal of clearing the region of Daesh."

- US backs role of Turkey, Russia in Syria cease-fire<sup>87</sup>

Brett McGurk, a top U.S. official in the anti-Daesh coalition, has voiced support for Turkey and Russia's leading role in enforcing the cease-fire in Syria.

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<sup>87</sup> <http://aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-backs-role-of-turkey-russia-in-syria-cess-fire-/753840>



Speaking at a panel discussion in the ongoing Munich Security Conference on Sunday, McGurk acknowledged shortcomings of the previous U.S. administration in the last couple of years in de-escalating the violence and brokering a truce in the region.

"One of the reasons that process did not succeed as we had hoped is frankly because we were guarantor and Russia was a guarantor. It turns out when the U.S. is a guarantor, we don't have people on the ground, we became a bit of a ping pong ball to try to control the situation," he said.

The U.S. special presidential envoy to the anti-Daesh coalition underlined Washington's full support for Turkey's efforts, and its discussions with Russia.

"Turkey and Russia are suitable guarantors and we are looking for a role that the U.S. can come in to help to reinforce that process through Astana," he said.

Turkey and Russia brokered last December a general cease-fire in Syria, followed by talks in Kazakhstan's capital Astana among conflict parties to enforce the cease-fire.

In Astana talks, Turkey, Russia and Iran agreed to a trilateral mechanism for observing and ensuring compliance with the cease-fire that went into effect on Dec. 30.

McGurk said the Astana process is not an alternative to UN-led peace talks in Geneva for a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

"The Astana process is about the mechanics of the cease-fire and making sure we continue to de-escalate the violence. The Geneva process through UN Security Council resolution 2254 is the locus of the political process and leading ultimately to the political transition. I think we have to keep those parallel tracks, while that are mutually reinforcing," he said.

Syria has been locked in a vicious civil war since early 2011, when the regime of Bashar al-Assad cracked down on pro-democracy protests -- which erupted as part of the Arab Spring uprisings -- with unexpected ferocity.

Since then, more than a quarter of a million people have been killed and more than 10 million displaced across the war-torn country, according to the UN, but the Syrian Center for Policy Research puts the death toll at more than 470,000.

- Iran rejects 'unconstructive' claims by Turkish FM<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/02/19/511247/Iran-Turkey-Bahram-Qassemi-Mevlut-Cavusoglu-Munich-Security-Conference>

Iran's Foreign Ministry has dismissed as unconstructive Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu's recent anti-Iran claims, saying Turkey and certain other "delusional" countries are responsible for instability and insecurity in the Middle East.

"Those who have carried out meddlesome, illegal and illegitimate measures, supported terrorist groups and caused bloodshed and escalation of tensions and instability in the region cannot evade liability for such moves by playing a blame game," Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Sunday.

They cannot free themselves from their self-imposed quagmire by leveling accusations against others, he added.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran's regional policy has always been and will be based on maintaining the stability and security of all countries and neighbors," the Iranian spokesperson said.

Qassemi emphasized that many fair governments and nations in the region and across the world have acknowledged such a policy pursued by Iran and welcome it.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Sunday, the Turkish foreign minister criticized what he called an Iranian "sectarian policy" aimed at undermining Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, saying, "Turkey is very much against any kind of division, religious or sectarian."

Turkish minister's remarks came despite the fact that his country is widely known as a staunch supporter of militants wreaking havoc in Syria, providing them with money and arms as well as free passage through Turkish soil to Syria.

- Turkey: Hundreds detained over alleged links to PKK<sup>89</sup>

Turkish police have detained more than 800 people over alleged links to Kurdish fighters in nationwide operations, according to state media. Police conducted simultaneous raids in 37 different provinces and taken 834 people into custody, state-run Anadolu Agency quoted police forces as saying on Tuesday.

Anadolu said authorities received intelligence that the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) would escalate attacks after February 15, the day marking the 1999 capture of imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

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<sup>89</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/turkey-hundreds-detained-alleged-links-pkk-170214162131411.html>

Along with the suspects, two Kalashnikovs, 11 guns, 15 rifles and ammunition were seized, police said.

The operations come as Turks prepare to vote on April 16 on replacing the parliamentary system with the stronger presidency sought by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The referendum will be held under a state of emergency imposed after an attempted coup last July.

Tens of thousands of people have been arrested since the abortive coup over suspected ties to Fethullah Gulen, the US-based Muslim leader and businessman accused by Ankara of organising the coup.

#### HDP reaction

The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) said the raids aimed to weaken it. "The basic goal of these operations ... is to hold the referendum without the HDP," a statement from its executive committee said. Its statement, released before Tuesday's arrests, said more than 300 of its members and executives had been detained on Monday, bringing those held this year to around 1,200. A dozen of its MPs and tens of Kurdish mayors from a sister party have been jailed pending trial.

The government accuses the HDP, parliament's second biggest opposition party, of being a political extension of the PKK.

The HDP denies direct links with the PKK and says it wants a peaceful settlement in Turkey's largely Kurdish southeast.

The PKK, designated a "terrorist" group by Turkey, the EU and the US, launched an armed struggle against the Turkish state in 1984 and more than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

A ceasefire between the PKK and the state broke down in July 2015 and thousands have been killed in the conflict since then.

## Cyber Security

- France denounces cyber attacks blamed on Moscow<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/news/2017/0219/853763-france-russia-election-cyber-attacks/>

Suspected Russian cyber attacks on the French presidential campaign are "unacceptable", France's foreign minister has said, adding it was clear that pro-Europe candidate Emmanuel Macron was being targeted.

A spokesman for Mr Macron, who is currently riding high in the polls, has accused Moscow of being behind a flurry of cyber attacks on his campaign website and email servers over the past month.

"It's enough to see which candidates, Marine Le Pen or Francois Fillon, Russia expresses preference for in the French electoral campaign," Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said in an interview with Journal du Dimanche.

"Whereas Emmanuel Macron, who is pro-Europe, is being targeted by cyber attacks," he added.

*"This form of interference in French democratic life is unacceptable and I denounce it."*

Ms Le Pen, of the far-right National Front, is anti-immigration and anti-European Union, while Mr Fillon is the conservative Republicans candidate who is pushing for closer ties with Moscow.

"Russia is the first to say that non-interference in domestic affairs is a cardinal rule and I understand that. Well, France won't accept its choices being dictated to it either," he added.

France warned Russia Wednesday against meddling in the elections, after a spokesman for Mr Macron - the 39-year-old centrist former economy minister - pointed the finger of blame at Moscow.

The allegations come in the midst of a furore over Russia's alleged interference in the US electoral campaign that has forced out one of President Donald Trump's top aides.

US intelligence agencies had already accused Russian intelligence of hacking Democratic Party emails that embarrassed Mr Trump's rival Hillary Clinton.

- Daily targeted in cyberattack after exposing 'fake news factory'<sup>91</sup>  
Swedish daily Eskilstuna-Kuriren was targeted in a major cyberattack on Friday after exposing a so-called fake news factory which creates its stories by getting influential people to give soundbites which are then heavily edited and presented as "quotes".

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<sup>91</sup> <http://www.thelocal.se/20170218/daily-targeted-in-cyberattack-after-exposing-fake-news-factory>

Jörgen Bröms, head of digital development at Eskilstuna-Kuriren, said the newspaper had been targeted in denial-of-service type of attack, with the aim of overloading the website and making it inaccessible.

"A bunch of requests are made at the same time with the purpose of bringing the website down. It looks as though a lot of people are visiting it at once," he said, noting that "it's impossible to track such attacks."

According to Bröms, the attack is directly related to the newspaper's recent expose of the web-based radio broadcaster Granskning Sverige (Scrutinising Sweden) which claims to represent citizen journalism, encouraging people to phone journalists, politicians and other influential people, provoking conversations with them which are then taped and posted on YouTube. The website compensates its contributors for every 3,000 clicks their recordings garner.

Eskilstuna-Kuriren recently investigated the online broadcaster, exposing it as a far-right, anti-migrant propaganda machine. The newspaper found that people working for the broadcaster used fake identities to fool their targets into giving them interviews, which were then taped and heavily edited, essentially patching together opinions and "quotes" that were never even uttered.

After the revelation, reporters at the daily were overwhelmed with emails and phonecalls by people who were both critical, but mostly positive, to their work regarding Granskning Sverige.

- Ukraine charges Russia with new cyber attacks on infrastructure<sup>92</sup>

Ukraine on Wednesday accused Russian hackers of targeting its power grid, financial system and other infrastructure with a new type of virus that attacks industrial processes, the latest in a series of cyber offensives against the country.

Oleksandr Tkachuk, Ukraine's security service chief of staff, said at a press conference that the attacks were orchestrated by the Russian security service with help from private software firms and criminal hackers, and looked like they were designed by the same people who created malware known as "BlackEnergy."

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) could not be reached for comment. Moscow has repeatedly denied accusations from Kiev that it has been waging a "cyber war" on

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-cyber-idUSKBN15U2CN>

Ukraine since relations between the two countries collapsed following Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of Russian-backed separatist fighting in Ukraine's Donbass region.

The allegations are the latest sign that Russia's behavior in conflict areas has not changed markedly since Donald Trump became U.S. president last month, calling for warmer relations between Washington and Moscow.

The new attacks caused some of Ukraine's cyber defenders to cancel plans to attend this week's RSA cyber security conference in San Francisco, according to one Western expert familiar with the situation.

If the allegations are confirmed, that could help Ukraine further its case for the United States to help coordinate a multi-national effort to counter the threat of Russian cyber warfare.

"There is a global cyber war of Russia against (the) whole world," President Petro Poroshenko told Reuters in an interview in January at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Ukraine said Russia made 6,500 cyber attacks on it in November and December alone. Ukraine blamed hackers for knocking out part of Kiev's power grid in December, and for attacks on the defense and finance ministries and the State Treasury.

Tkachuk said at Wednesday's press conference that malicious software used in the campaign was designed to attack specific industrial processes. As an example, he said that the code included modules that sought to harm equipment inside the electric grid.

"Russian hackers and infobots become an important tool of the aggression against our country," Tkachuk said.

He said the attacks employed a mechanism dubbed "Telebots" to infect computers that control infrastructure.

Slovakian cyber-security firm ESET used the same name in December to identify the hacking group responsible for attacks on Ukraine's financial sector and energy industries.

ESET said it believed that Telebots had evolved from BlackEnergy, a hacking group that attacked Ukraine's energy industry starting in December 2015.

ESET researcher Cameron Camp said that the latest attack software sounded like a modest adaptation of a program his firm had published a report on in December.

- Fallon: NATO failing to stop Russian cyber attacks<sup>93</sup>

The Defence Secretary has criticised NATO for not being "agile" enough to prevent Russian cyber attacks on Europe.

Speaking on the first day of the annual Security Conference in Munich, Sir Michael Fallon said the alliance has work to do and would not say whether or not the UK was carrying out offensive cyber attacks against Russia. "The NATO machinery is not geared up," he said.

"It has not been fast enough in dealing with threats like terrorism or cyber.

"That's one of the areas in which NATO needs to be more agile. It needs to respond to cyber threats. "Cyber capabilities are obviously sovereign and belong to the nation states, the member states of NATO. But NATO needs to get sharper about how those (capabilities) could be deployed in the NATO context and how we deter against cyber threats. That is a role for NATO."

At last summer's NATO Summit in Warsaw, leaders agreed that a cyber attack could constitute an Article Five response, raising the prospect of war if an enemy state hacked a NATO country.

Pressed by Sky News on what that could mean, Sir Michael would not give details.

"We are very careful about not articulating exactly how and Article 5 would be defined or calibrated because that would only give comfort to our adversaries," he said.

"It's very important that we remain uncertain as to how NATO would respond."

Privately it is felt that any attack would have to result in the loss of life before Article 5 was triggered, but in the past year Russia has been openly accused by governments of interfering in the US elections and there are fears it is doing the same in the forthcoming French and German votes.

- Why Iran's favorite weapon is the cyber attack<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> <http://news.sky.com/story/fallon-nato-failing-to-stop-russian-cyber-attacks-10771630>

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.in/why-irans-favorite-weapon-is-the-cyber-attack/articleshow/56943466.cms>

In a piece written for The Cipher Brief, Michael Eisenstadt of the Washington Institute details Iran's weapon of choice for imposing its will on domestic and foreign threats alike - cyber attacks.

Eisenstadt, as well as experts contacted by Business Insider, say that Iran has a weak conventional military that couldn't possibly hope to push around stronger countries. For that reason, cyber attacks represent the perfect weapon.

Cyber attacks are cheap, ambiguous, hard to pin on any one actor, and almost completely without precedent when it comes to gauging a military response.

Cyber attacks allow Iran "to strike at adversaries globally, instantaneously, and on a sustained basis, and to potentially achieve strategic effects in ways it cannot in the physical domain," writes Eisenstadt.

Unlike the US, which wields nuclear weapons and the world's finest military, Iran relies on its ability to potentially wreak havoc in the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest oil shipping routes, its funding of terrorist organizations, and its arsenal of ballistic missiles to deter attacks, according to Eisenstadt.

However, Tehran cannot hold the Strait of Hormuz in an outright confrontation, its terrorist allies have become increasingly vulnerable and targetable by world powers, and if Iran ever used a ballistic missile, it would soon find itself on the receiving end of a blistering counter attack.

Therefore cyber attacks give Iran a fourth kind of deterrence, one which the US has repeatedly failed to punish. Indeed, cyber attacks are new territory, and the US still hasn't found an appropriate and consistent way to deal with cyber attacks, whether those attacks come in the form of Russian meddling in the US election, North Korea's hack of Sony, or China's stealing valuable defense data.

Eisenstadt addresses this lack of US response as a "credibility gap," which the US must somehow fill.

- Tehran provoking war, Yemen complains to UN<sup>95</sup>

ADEN: The Yemeni government on Saturday filed a complaint with the UN over Iran's continuous incitement of war and attacking of neighboring countries.

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1056926/saudi-arabia>



Ambassador Khaled Al-Yamani, Yemen's permanent representative to the UN, said Iran is continuing to incite war in Yemen and conflict in corridors of the southern Red Sea and the strategic Bab Al-Mandab.

In a letter sent by his country's legitimate government to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the ambassador said Iran continues to fund Houthis in Yemen. Iran, he added, supports Houthi groups militarily and strategically through funding, training of fighters, and provision of shipments of weapons and ammunition, a clear violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

The complaint, which was published on Sunday by the Yemeni Press Agency, also reveals that shipments containing smuggled Iranian weapons have been intercepted on several occasions by member countries and joint naval forces.

Meanwhile, Houthis sent 7,000 Yemeni students on scholarships to Qom, Iran, to study. But the Yemeni Ministry of Education, belonging to the legitimate government, stopped the efforts and said it will not accept any foreign curriculum contradictory to the nature and creed of Yemeni society, said Abdullah Lamlas, Yemen's minister of education.

Lamlas said the government will amend the education curriculum changed by the Houthis.

The Yemeni education curriculum is one of several major challenges faced by the government. Education is considered one of the most important means to establish a new Yemen under the legitimate government following the coup carried out by the Houthis and the ousted Saleh supporters.

The circumstances created by the coup militias created a deep rift in the educational infrastructure at the physical and intellectual levels, notably the changes to the curriculum, and the introduction of sectarian and revolutionary tendencies.

In regards to Iran's military support of the rebels, the commander of the Houthi coup militias, Abdul-Malek Al-Houthi, said in a televised speech on Feb. 10 that his group has begun manufacturing spy planes. The letter to the UN from Yemen's legitimate government argues that this proves the extent of Iran's involvement in the supplying of weapons and expertise to the Houthis. In turn, such support is only contributing to extending the war and obstructing peace.

Al-Yamani also said that Houthi militias are still receiving training from elements linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, namely Hezbollah, on how to use modern weapons looted from Yemeni armed forces' warehouses, as well as Iranian weapons.

"Houthi and Saleh coup militias have launched ballistic missiles in an indiscriminate and irresponsible manner targeting the border of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has resulted in hundreds of injuries and destruction of infrastructure, including schools and hospitals," the letter stated.

The ambassador said the Qaher-1 and Zelzal-3 ballistic missiles used in such attacks were manufactured in Iran, as determined by the committee of experts on Yemen. Houthi militias have also attacked ships passing through the southern Red Sea area in a manner similar to the mechanisms and tactics used by Iranian forces in the Strait of Hormuz.

## Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

(Dr. Ambreen Agha)

### (I) Pakistan

- FATA: Several dead in airstrikes in NWA

Fighter jets of the Pakistan Air Force bombed a number of terrorists who were trying to regroup in Wucha Bibi area of North Waziristan Agency (NWA) in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on February 19, reports *The Express Tribune*. "Terrorists tried to regroup in Wucha Bibi, a border area in North Waziristan Agency. Hideout destroyed, terrorists inside killed," read the one-line statement issued by ISPR.<sup>96</sup>

- FATA: 11 militants killed in clash with SFs in Kurram Agency

At least 11 suspected militants, allegedly attempting to enter Pakistan from Afghanistan, were killed in a clash with security officials in Kurram Agency of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) on February 19, reports *Dawn*. Two security personnel were also killed in the exchange of fire.

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<sup>96</sup> Air strikes target terrorists regrouping in NWA; several dead, *The Express Tribune*, February, 19, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1332074/nearly-dozen-militants-killed-kurram-agency-encounter/>, accessed on February 20, 2017

- Punjab: Five JuA terrorists shot dead in Layyah District

At least five alleged terrorists, affiliated with Jama'at-ul-Ahrar (JuA), were shot dead by Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) personnel in Layyah District on February 19, reports *Dawn*. According to CTD, three of their associates managed to flee from the spot. The CTD recovered a heavy cache of weapons and maps of sensitive sites from their possession.<sup>97</sup>

- Balochistan: Most wanted terrorist killed in Quetta

A most wanted terrorist was killed on New Saryab Road in provincial capital Quetta on February 19, reports *Dawn*.<sup>98</sup>

- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Maulana Kaleemullah shot dead in Charsadda District

A local leader of Khatm-e-Nabuwat conference, Maulana Kaleemullah Khan, was shot dead in front of his home by unidentified armed assailants in Bolkhail Town area of Charsadda District on February 19, reports *Daily Times*.<sup>99</sup>

- Mullah Fazlullah's son carried out Bannu attack, claims TTP spokesperson

Nearly two weeks after a suicide bomber targeted a Police Station in Bannu District of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on February 19 claimed that the attack was carried out by the son of militant organisation's chief Mullah Fazlullah, reports *The Express Tribune*. "The attack was carried out by TTP chief's son Maulana Najeebullah Swati," the message, which also carried a picture of the suicide bomber, read.<sup>100</sup>

- Shoot-on-sight orders over illegal entry from Afghanistan

As Pakistan's border with Afghanistan at Chaman town (Qilla Abdullah District/Balochistan) remains closed on the second consecutive day on February 18,

<sup>97</sup> Five terrorists gunned down in Layyah: CTD , *Geo News*, February 19, 2017, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/131587-Five-terrorists-gun-down-in-Layyah-CTD>, accessed on February 20, 2017

<sup>98</sup> Ali Akbar, 11 'militants' killed in clash with security forces in Kurram Agency: officials, *Dawn*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315715/11-militants-killed-in-clash-with-security-forces-in-kurram-agency-officials>, accessed on February 20, 2017

<sup>99</sup> Maulana Kaleemullah shot dead in Charsadda, *Daily Times*, February 20, 2017, <http://dailytimes.com.pk/khyber-pakhtunkhwa/20-Feb-17/maulana-kaleemullah-shot-dead-in-charsadda>, accessed on February 20, 2017

<sup>100</sup> Riaz Ahmad, Mullah Fazlullah's son carried out Bannu attack, claims TTP spokesperson, *The Express Tribune*, February 19, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1332218/mullah-fazlullahs-son-carried-bannu-attack-claims-ttp-spokesperson/>, accessed on February 20, 2017

authorities issued shoot-at-sight orders for those found trying to cross over, reports *Dawn*. The Friendship Gate was closed on February 17, 2017, as part of tightening security in the wake of the February 16, 2017, suicide attack on the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan town of Jamshoro District in Sindh. "Shooting order has been issued to the security forces for those...found trying to enter...Pakistan illegally from any area of the border," security officials said. "The Friendship Gate at Pak-Afghan border [has been] sealed for [an] indefinite period," a Frontier Corps spokesman said.<sup>101</sup>

- Military courts need of the hour, says PTI's Shah Mehmood

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) Vice Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi while addressing a gathering of his supporters in Tharparkar District on February 19 said that military courts in the country are the need of the hour as the Government has failed to curb terror attacks, reports *Dawn*. "The non-serious attitude of the federal government is among the prime factors behind continued terror acts," said Qureshi. He said that the National Action Plan needs to be implemented across the country, and lauded the army chief's decision to summon Afghan envoys to convey the concerns from the government.<sup>102</sup>

- Balochistan: 14 Baloch militants surrender

As many as 14 Baloch militants gave up their arms and renounced violence on February 18, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said, reports *The Express Tribune*. The former separatists – belonged to the Balochistan Liberation Army, United Baloch Army and Baloch Republican Army (BRA) – pledged loyalty to Pakistan and announced they are disassociating with their leaders.<sup>103</sup>

- Pakistan asks Afghanistan to handover 76 terrorists immediately

Pakistan Army on February 17 asked Kabul to handover 76 terrorists hiding in Afghanistan, reports *The Express Tribune*. Inter Services Public Relations DG Major-General Asif Ghafoor said that the head of Afghan Embassy officials were called to General Headquarters and were "Given list of 76 terrorists hiding in Afghanistan. [They have been] Asked to take immediate action/be handed over to Pakistan." "The

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<sup>101</sup> Shoot-on-sight orders over illegal entry from Afghanistan, *Dawn*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315663/shoot-on-sight-orders-over-illegal-entry-from-afghanistan>, accessed on February 20, 2017

<sup>102</sup> Military courts need of the hour, says PTI's Shah Mehmood, *Dawn*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315726/military-courts-need-of-the-hour-says-ptis-shah-mehmood>, accessed on February 20, 2017

<sup>103</sup> Another 14 Baloch militants renounce violence, *The Express Tribune*, February 18, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1331472/another-14-baloch-militants-renounce-violence/>, accessed on February 20, 2017

Pakistan-Afghanistan border closed with immediate effect till further orders due to security reasons," ISPR DG Ghafoor tweeted.<sup>104</sup>

- Sindh: 90 people killed in sectarian attack in Sehwan Sharif shrine

At least 90 people, including 12 women and four children, were killed and more than 340 were injured in a suicide attack on the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan area of Jamshoro District on February 16, reports *Dawn*. The Assistant Superintendent of Police in Sehwan said that a suicide bomber entered the shrine through its Golden gate. The attacker blew himself up after throwing a grenade, which failed to explode.<sup>105</sup>

- Punjab: Six Jama'at-ul-Ahrar militants killed in CTD raid in Multan

The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab Police raided a militant hideout and killed six militants belonging to Jama'at-ul-Ahrar (JuA), the breakaway faction of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), on February 16, reports *Dawn*. The outfit has launched a new campaign of violence in the country, Police said.<sup>106</sup>

- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Five persons including four Policemen killed in DI Khan

Four Policemen and a passerby were killed when their vehicle was attacked by unidentified armed assailants in Mission Mor area of Dera Ismail (DI) Khan District on February 16, reports *Dawn*. The victims were identified as Assistant Sub-Inspector Rehmatullah, Constable Iqbal, Constable Irshad and a passerby Fazal.<sup>107</sup>

- Balochistan: Three army soldiers killed in Awaran District

Three Pakistan Army personnel were killed when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), targeting an army convoy, exploded in Awaran District on February 16, reports

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<sup>104</sup> Pakistan asks Afghanistan to handover 76 terrorists immediately, *The Express Tribune*, February 17, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1329655/pakistan-asks-afghanistan-handover-76-terrorists-immediately/>, accessed on February 17, 2017

<sup>105</sup> Mohammad Hussain Khan, Qurban Ali Khushik, Imtiaz Ali, At least 70 dead as bomb rips through Lal Shahbaz shrine in Sehwan, Sindh, *Dawn*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315136/at-least-70-dead-as-bomb-rips-through-lal-shahbaz-shrine-in-sehwan-sindh>, accessed on February 17, 2017

<sup>106</sup> 6 suspected Jamaat-ul-Ahrar militants killed in CTD raid in Multan, *Dawn*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315123/6-suspected-jamaat-ul-ahrar-militants-killed-in-ctd-raid-in-multan>, accessed on February 17, 2017

<sup>107</sup> Four policemen among five killed in Dera Ismail Khan, *Dawn*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315155/four-policemen-among-five-killed-in-dera-ismail-khan>, accessed on February 17, 2017

*Dawn*. The killed were identified as Captain Taha, Sepoy Kamran Satti and Sepoy Mehtar Jan.<sup>108</sup>

- FATA: Two FC personnel injured in cross-border attack

Two Frontier Corps (FC) personnel were injured when suspected militants from the Afghan side of the border attacked a check post in Khyber Agency of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) on February 16 reports *Dawn*. According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), FC personnel retaliated to the killing a few militants.

- FATA: Five persons killed in suicide attack in Mohmand Agency

At least three personnel of the Khasadar force and two civilians were killed while three others persons were injured in a suicide attack in Ghalanai *tehsil* (revenue unit) of Mohmand Agency in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) on February 16, reports *Dawn*. Jama'at-ul-Ahrar (JuA), a breakaway faction of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement emailed to journalists. According to details, a suicide bomber tried to enter a housing colony of the local political administration. When he was stopped in this attempt by Khasadar personnel, the militant blew himself up outside the main gate of the colony. Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement said two suicide bombers were involved in the attack.<sup>109</sup>

- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Two persons killed in separate incidents

The driver of the vehicle carrying Civil Judge Asif Jadoon and four other judges was killed in a suicide attack in Phase V of Hayatabad area in provincial capital Peshawar on February 15, reports *Dawn*. Four judges and two others sustained injuries in the attack. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>110</sup>

Separately, unidentified armed assailants shot dead a Policeman, identified as Waheedullah, while another, identified as Salman, escaped the targeted attack near a

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<sup>108</sup> Three Pakistan Army soldiers killed in Balochistan's Awaran, *Dawn*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1315133/three-pakistan-army-soldiers-killed-in-balochistans-awaran>, accessed on February 17, 2017

<sup>109</sup> Ali Akbar, Suicide bomber strikes Mohmand; 3 Khasadar personnel, 2 civilians killed, *Dawn*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1314932/suicide-bomber-strikes-mohmand-3-khasadar-personnel-2-civilians-killed>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>110</sup> Ali Akbar, Suicide bomber targets Peshawar judges' vehicle; driver killed, *Dawn*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1314950/suicide-bomber-targets-peshawar-judges-vehicle-driver-killed>, accessed on February 16, 2017

police post on the Grand Trunk Road in Pashtoon Ghari area of Nowshera District on February 15, reports *The News*.<sup>111</sup>

- Azad Kashmir: Shia scholar and his wife injured in sectarian attack in Muzaffarabad District

Unidentified armed assailants shot at and injured a Shia scholar, Secretary General (SG) of Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen (MWM), Allama Syed Tasawar Hussain Naqvi al-Jawadi (38), in a sectarian attack while he was travelling with his wife on Jhelum Valley Road in Muzaffarabad District on February 15, reports *The Nation*. His wife also sustained injuries.<sup>112</sup>

- Hafiz Saeed appeals for removal of his name from ECL

Jama'at-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed and 37 other affiliated with the organisation in a letter written to the Federal Ministry of Interior requested to remove their names from the Exit Control List (ECL), claiming the JuD has never been involved in any terrorist activity in Pakistan, reports *Dawn*. The Ministry's Department of ECL on behalf of JuD chief and others, AK Dogar pleaded that a memorandum issued on January 30, 2017 placing 38 individuals should be withdrawn. The lawyer stated that the JuD has never been involved in any terrorist activity in Pakistan and no incident of terrorism or destruction of property was ever alleged against the organisation."<sup>113</sup>

- SECP moves to unfreeze Gulbuddin Hekmatyar accounts

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) on February 15 informed the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has moved to defreeze the accounts of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of Hezb-e-Islami, reports *The Express Tribune*. The SECP said that the asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo set out in paragraph 2 of the Security Council Resolution 2253(2015) adopted under chapter VII of the Charter of the UN accordingly no longer apply to him. Earlier on February 3, 2017, the UN lifted sanctions imposed on Hekmatyar.<sup>114</sup>

- Punjab: 13 persons killed in suicide attack in Lahore

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<sup>111</sup> Gunmen shot dead cop in Nowshera , *The News*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/186618-Gunmen-shot-dead-cop-in-Nowshera>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>112</sup> Allama Tasawar Jawadi injured in firing, *The Nation*, February 15, 2017, <http://nation.com.pk/national/15-Feb-2017/allama-tasawar-jawadi-injured-in-firing>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>113</sup> Hafiz Saeed appeals for removal of his name from ECL, *The News*, February 15, 2107, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/186663-Hafiz-Saeed-appeals-for-removal-of-his-name-from-ECL>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>114</sup> SECP moves to unfreeze Hekmatyar accounts, *The Express Tribune*, February 16, 2107, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1328377/secp-moves-unfreeze-hekmatyar-accounts/>, accessed on February 16, 2017

At least 13 persons, including six Policemen, were killed and 85 others were injured in a suicide attack outside the Punjab Assembly in provincial capital Lahore on February 13, reports *Dawn*. Jama'at-ul-Ahrar (JuA), a breakaway faction of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack. "The suicide attacker was on foot," Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Chief Dr Mohammad Iqbal had said. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP)-Operations Zahid Gondal of Punjab Police and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Traffic Lahore Captain (retired) Ahmad Mobin were among those killed in the attack.

Earlier, in a February 7, 2017, a notification addressing the Home Secretary, Punjab, the Provincial Police Officer and DG Pak Rangers Punjab, the National Counterterrorism Authority (NACTA) had warned of a possible terrorist attack in Lahore. NACTA had directed that all vital installations, including important buildings, hospitals and schools, be kept under strict vigilance.<sup>115</sup>

- FATA: Three tribal elders and three FC personnel killed separate incidents in FATA

Unidentified armed assailants shot dead three tribal elders, identified as Muhammad Afzal, Muhammad Javed and Wakil, in Sheikhan area of Orakzai Agency in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) while they were returning to the village after attending a *jirga* (council) on February 13, reports *The News*. Another elder, identified as Saqib, had sustained injuries.<sup>116</sup>

Separately, three Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel were killed in an Improvised Explosives Device (IED) blast during cordon and search operation in Khan Kot Zarmina area of Toe Khula District in South Waziristan Agency on February 12, reports *Dawn*.<sup>117</sup>

- Balochistan: Two BDS officials killed while defusing bomb in Quetta

Two Bomb Disposal Squad officials (BDS) were killed while defusing a 20-kilogramme bomb that had been planted beneath the Sariab Bridge of provincial capital Quetta on February 13, reports *Dawn*. Around a dozen people were injured in the blast.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Imran Gabol, Senior police officers among 13 killed as suicide bomber strikes Lahore, *Dawn*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1314549/senior-police-officers-among-13-killed-as-suicide-bomber-strikes-lahore>, accessed on February 14, 2017

<sup>116</sup> Three tribal elders shot dead in Orakzai, *The News*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/186111-Three-tribal-elders-shot-dead-in-Orakzai>, accessed on February 14, 2017

<sup>117</sup> Ali Akbar, 3 FC personnel killed in South Waziristan blast, *Dawn*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1314534/3-fc-personnel-killed-in-south-waziristan-blast>, accessed on February 14, 2017

<sup>118</sup> Syed Ali Shah, Two BDS officials die while defusing bomb in Quetta, *Dawn*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1314555/two-bds-officials-die-while-defusing-bomb-in-quetta>, accessed on February 14, 2017



- Afghan refugees' return is forced, not voluntary, says HRW Report

Pakistan is conducting the mass repatriation of Afghan refugees through coercion, threats and abuse, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a Report, entitled '*Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity: The Mass Forced Return of Afghan Refugees*', on February 13, accusing the United Nations (UN) refugee agency of complicity in promoting the exodus, reports *Daily Times*.

"After decades of hosting Afghan refugees, Pakistan in mid-2016 unleashed the world's largest recent anti-refugee crackdowns to coerce their mass return," said Gerry Simpson, a refugee researcher at HRW, adding, "Because the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) didn't stand up publicly... [against refugees' forced return], international donors should step in to press the government and [the] UN to protect the remaining Afghan refugees in Pakistan."<sup>119</sup>

- Dependence on Rangers in Karachi has affected performance of Police, says IG Sindh

Sindh Inspector General (IG) Allah Dino Khawaja during the Karachi Chamber [of Commerce and Industries] speech on February 8 said that dependence on the Rangers for security in Karachi has affected performance of the police force, while also leaving the latter politicised, reports *The Express Tribune*. He faced criticism over this statement concerning deployment of Rangers in the Province. He had also said the people allegedly involved in killings of the Policemen who were at the front of the 1990s security operation in Karachi became Legislators and Ministers.<sup>120</sup>

## (II) Afghanistan

- Haqqani Network leader killed in Afghan forces coordinated attack

A leader of the Haqqani Network, identified as Khan Badshah *alias* Faryadi, was killed along with his accomplices, identified as Syedan and Mohsin, in an airstrike conducted

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<sup>119</sup> Afghan refugees' return is forced, not voluntary: HRW, *Daily Times*, February 14, 2017, <http://dailytimes.com.pk/pakistan/14-Feb-17/afghan-refugees-return-is-forced-not-voluntary-hrw/>, accessed on February 14, 2017

<sup>120</sup> Dependence on Rangers in Karachi has affected performance of police: IG Sindh, *The Express Tribune*, February 13, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1324781/dependence-rangers-karachi-affected-performance-police-ig-sindh/>, accessed on February 14, 2017

by the Afghan forces in an unspecified location in the Southeast of the country on February 16, reports *Khaama Press*.<sup>121</sup>

- 38 ISIS militants killed during Shaheen-25 operations in Nangarhar Province

At least 38 Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants were killed during the newly-launched Shaheen-25 military operations in Nangarhar Province on February 15, reports *Khaama Press*.<sup>122</sup> The Nangarhar Police commandment said huge caches of explosives, weapons, and ammunition was seized during the operations.<sup>123</sup>

- Militants kidnap 52 farmers in Jawzjan Province

Unidentified militants abducted at least 52 farmers from Darzab District in Jawzjan province on February 15, reports *Khaama Press*.<sup>124</sup> No outfit claimed responsibility for abduction.

- NATO firmly committed to Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan says NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

The NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg while speaking during a pre-ministerial press conference on February 15, ahead of the two-day NATO Defense Ministers meeting in Brussels, said that the alliance is firmly committed to its Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, reports *Khaama Press*. In response to a question regarding the US concerns about the level of troops in Afghanistan, Stoltenberg, said “We are firmly committed to our Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan and the heads of state and government made last year a decision to continue our military presence in Afghanistan, to continue to provide funding for the Afghan National Army and Security Forces and to develop the political partnership with Afghanistan.”<sup>125</sup>

- 20 militants killed in airstrikes in southern Uruzgan Province

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<sup>121</sup> Top Haqqani network leader killed in Afghan forces coordinated attack, *Khaama Press*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/top-haqqani-network-leader-killed-in-afghan-forces-coordinated-attack-02899>, accessed on February 17, 2017

<sup>122</sup> 38 ISIS militants killed during Shaheen-25 operations in Nangarhar, *Khaama Press*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/38-isis-militants-killed-during-shaheen-25-operations-in-nangarahr-02888>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>123</sup> 38 ISIS militants killed during Shaheen-25 operations in Nangarhar, *Khaama Press*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/38-isis-militants-killed-during-shaheen-25-operations-in-nangarahr-02888>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>124</sup> Militants kidnap 52 farmers in northern Jawzjan province, *Khaama Press*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/militants-kidnap-52-farmers-in-northern-jawzjan-province-02889>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>125</sup> NATO firmly committed to Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan: Stoltenberg, *Khaama Press*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/nato-firmly-committed-to-resolute-support-mission-in-afghanistan-stoltenberg-02891>, accessed on February 16, 2017

At least 20 militants were killed in a series of airstrikes conducted in Tarinkot city of Uruzgan Province, reports *Khaama Press* on February 14. Provincial Governor's spokesman Dost Mohammad Nayab confirmed the incident.<sup>126</sup>

- Taliban shadow District chief killed with his fighters in Paktika

A senior Taliban leader, identified as Pacha *alias* Faryadi, was killed with four fighters during an airstrike in Barmal District of Paktika Province on February 11, reports *Khaama Press*. The Provincial Government media office in a statement said the senior Taliban leader was the shadow District chief of Barmal and was killed together with his four fighters.<sup>127</sup>

### (III) Iraq

- ISIS leader among six others killed by own premature blast in Nangarhar

A leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), identified as Shakir *alias* Warak, was killed along with five other militants in a premature explosion in Kot District of Nangarhar on February 18, reports *Khaama Press*.<sup>128</sup>

- Four people killed car bomb blast in Baghdad

Four persons were killed, while 15 others were wounded in a car bomb blast, in southern Baghdad, on February 16, reports *Iraqi News*. A Police source confirmed, saying, "A booby-trapped vehicle, parked in al-Baya' area in southern Baghdad exploded, today, killing four persons and wounding 15 others."<sup>129</sup>

- IS forces residents to feed its combat detachments in Mosul

A local source in Nineveh Province revealed on February 16 that the Islamic State forced some residents of western Mosul to provide food to its combat detachments, reports *Iraqi News*. The source said, "The Islamic State forced the residents of western Mosul to feed its combat detachments in the neighborhoods of the area," adding, "The Islamic State considered the presenting food to its detachments as a support for the

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<sup>126</sup>20 militants killed in airstrikes in southern Uruzgan province, *Khaama Press*, February 14, 2015, <http://www.khaama.com/20-militants-killed-in-airstrikes-in-southern-uruzgan-province-02881>, accessed on February 15, 2017

<sup>127</sup> Taliban shadow district chief killed with his fighters in Paktika, *Khaama Press*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/taliban-shadow-district-chief-killed-with-his-fighters-in-paktika-02870>, accessed on February 14, 2017

<sup>128</sup> ISIS leader among 6 killed by own explosives in Nangarhar, *Khaama Press*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/isis-leader-among-6-killed-by-own-explosives-in-nangarhar-02922>, February 20, 2017

<sup>129</sup> Car bomb blast south of Baghdad leaves 19 casualties, *Iraqi News*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/bomb-blast-baghdad-leaves-19-casualties/>, accessed on February 17, 2017

group". "The group threatens to punish anyone who violates its instruction," the source added.<sup>130</sup>

- 25 people killed in car bomb attack in Baghdad

A car bomb blast hit Habibiya area in eastern Baghdad, killing five people and wounding 20 others, Baghdad Operations Command said on February 15, reports *Iraqi News*.<sup>131</sup>

- 24 ISIS militants killed in Eastern Mosul

A Counter-Terrorism Officer Major Ali Mohsen announced on February 14 that 24 ISIS militants, including two elite leaders, were killed, after sneaking in al-Maliyah area of Mosul, reports *Iraqi News*. "The security forces emphasized the importance of reporting any suspicious movements in the area, to prevent the sneaking of the Islamic State's members into the liberated areas," Mohsen added.<sup>132</sup>

- Security Forces seize 400 IEDs east of Ramadi

A source in Anbar Operations Command revealed that Security Forces discovered a cache of weapons containing 400 Improvised Explosive Devices, east of Ramadi on February 14, reports *Iraqi News*. The source said, "Army forces discovered a cache of weapons containing 400 improvised explosive devices in Husaiba area (23 east of Ramadi)," adding, "Security sources detonated the cache, without inflicting any human losses".<sup>133</sup>

#### (IV) Syria

- President Trump he will create 'safe zones' in Syria and get Gulf States to pay for them

United States (US) President Donald Trump, speaking at a campaign rally in Florida on February 18, said that he wants to establish "safe zones" in Syria and other places instead of taking people into the US, and that the Gulf States would pay for those safe

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<sup>130</sup> Islamic State forces western Mosul's residents to feed its combat detachments, *Iraqi News*, February 16, 2017, <http://www.iraqnews.com/iraq-war/islamic-state-forces-western-mosuls-residents-feed-combat-detachments/>, accessed on February 17, 2017

<sup>131</sup> Loaa Adel, Car bomb blast in Habibiya near Baghdad leaves 25 casualties, *Iraqi News*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.iraqnews.com/iraq-war/car-bomb-blast-habibiya-near-baghdad-leaves-25-casualties/>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>132</sup> Loaa Adel, Security forces kill 24 IS members after sneaking into eastern Mosul, *Iraqi News*, February 14, 2017, <http://www.iraqnews.com/iraq-war/forces-kill-24-sneaking-members-mosul/>, accessed on February 15, 2017

<sup>133</sup> Loaa Adel, Security forces seize 400 IEDs east of Ramadi, *Iraqi News*, February 14, 2017, <http://www.iraqnews.com/iraq-war/security-forces-seize-400-ieds-east-ramadi/>, accessed on February 15, 2017

zones, saying that "they have nothing but money," reports *ABC News*. "We've allowed thousands and thousands of people into our country and there was no way to vet those people, there was no documentation there was no nothing. So, we're going to keep our country safe," Trump said.<sup>134</sup>

- Fighting intensifies in Deraa

Russian jets targeted rebel-held areas of Deraa for two days after Syrian opposition groups on February 12, 2017, stormed the heavily garrisoned Manshiya District in a campaign that sought to obstruct any army attempts to capture a strategic border crossing with Jordan from the opposition, reports *Al Jazeera*. A rebel source said there were at least 30 Russian sorties on February 14, 2107, thwarting further rebel gains in the heavily defended enclave that had allowed them so far to secure significant parts of the Manshiya. "When the regime began to lose control of some areas ... the Russian jets began their operations," said Ibrahim Abdullah, a senior rebel commander.<sup>135</sup>

- Start of Syria talks in Astana delayed by one day

Talks on the Syrian crisis involving Russia, Iran, and Turkey that were due to start in the Kazakh capital, Astana, on February 15 have been delayed by one day, Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry said without explaining the reason for the delay, reports *Al Jazeera*. "The negotiations have been moved to February 16 for technical reasons," a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.<sup>136</sup>

- Ceasefire frays in Syria's south as rebels launch new offensive

The ceasefire brokered by Turkey and Russia in December 2016 is fraying along Syria's southern border as rebel forces launch their largest offensive in the area in more than a year, reports *The Washington Post* on February 16. Monitors, activists and an aid group said fighting between opposition and pro-government forces raged for a fourth day on February 15 in the city of Daraa, pushing the number of dead and wounded past 60.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> President Trump says he will create 'safe zones' in Syria and get Gulf states to pay for them, *ABC News*, February 18, 2017, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-trump-speaks-campaign-rally-florida/story?id=45584942>, accessed on February 20, 2017

<sup>135</sup> Fighting intensifies in Syria's Deraa , *Al Jazeera*, February 17, 2107, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/russia-targets-rebel-held-areas-syria-deraa-170216185755749.html>, accessed on February 17, 2017

<sup>136</sup> Start of Syria talks in Astana delayed by one day , *Al Jazeera*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/start-syria-talks-astana-delayed-day-170215051443836.html>, accessed on February 16, 2017

<sup>137</sup> Louisa Loveluck, Cease-fire frays in Syria's south as rebels launch new offensive, *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2107, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/cease-fire-frays-in-syrias-south-as-rebels-launch-new-offensive/2017/02/15/5bc2ea3c-f375-11e6-8d72-263470bf0401\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c1df61e8ccde](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/cease-fire-frays-in-syrias-south-as-rebels-launch-new-offensive/2017/02/15/5bc2ea3c-f375-11e6-8d72-263470bf0401_story.html?utm_term=.c1df61e8ccde), accessed on February 16, 2017

- Syrian al Qaeda group 100 jihadist rebels in Idlib

The Syrian al Qaeda faction, Jund Al-Aqsa, executed over 100 jihadist prisoners in Idlib and Hama governorates on February 14, reports *Al Masdar News*. Jund Al-Aqsa's official media wing released the names of over 100 rebel fighters they reportedly executed, along with some photos of their corpses. The terrorist outfit has been at war with several rebel factions, including Harakat Ahrar Al-Sham, for the last six months, as disputes over governance and territory between these former allies continue.<sup>138</sup>

- US Embassy in Kazakhstan to Represent Washington at Astana Talks on Syria

The fresh round of consultations on Syria peace process in Astana is slated to start on February 16, 2017, reports *Sputnik*. The first round of Astana talks on Syrian crisis settlement brought together the representatives of the Syrian Government and the armed opposition groups for the first time in the six years of the Syrian war. As a result of the talks, Russia, Iran and Turkey agreed to establish a trilateral mechanism to monitor the ceasefire that came into effect on December 30, 2016.<sup>139</sup>

- Syrian Government used chemical weapons in Aleppo, says HRW Report

Syrian government forces used chemical weapons in rebel-held areas of Aleppo during the final weeks of the battle to retake the key city, killing at least nine people and wounding hundreds more, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW) Report released on February 13, reports *Al Jazeera*. The report stated that it had verified eight chemical attacks during the offensive from November 17, 2016 to December 13, 2016 adding that four children were among the victims. HRW said it had interviewed witnesses, collected photos and reviewed video footage to reach the conclusion that chlorine bombs were dropped from government helicopters during the operation.<sup>140</sup>

- Syrian Government ready for prisoner swaps with rebels, says officials

The Syrian Government said on February 13 that it was ready to agree prisoner swaps with rebel groups, a potential Confidence-Building Measure, reports *Iraqi News*. The Syrian opposition has long demanded a release of detainees held by the government as

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<sup>138</sup> Leith Fadel, Syrian Al-Qaeda group slaughters over 100 jihadist rebels in Idlib, *Al Masdar News*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-al-qaeda-group-slaughters-100-jihadist-rebels-idlib/>, accessed on February 15, 2017

<sup>139</sup> US Embassy in Kazakhstan to Represent Washington at Astana Talks on Syria, *Sputnik*, February 15, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201702151050690177-us-embassy-astana-talks/>, accessed on February 15, 2017

<sup>140</sup> HRW: Syria carried out chemical attacks in Aleppo, *Al Jazeera*, February 14, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/hrw-syria-carried-chemical-attacks-aleppo-170213194810207.html>, accessed on February 14, 2017

one of several humanitarian actions they say must take place ahead of any negotiations over Syria's political future. The government was "always ready" to exchange prisoners in its jails for people "kidnapped by terrorist groups", Syrian state media cited an official source as saying. A rebel official told Reuters the demand had been raised during indirect talks with the government in the Kazakh capital of Astana.<sup>141</sup>

- Syria rebels cast doubt on attending Kazakhstan talks

Syrian rebels on February 13 cast doubt on attending Russian-backed peace talks this week, accusing Moscow of failing to get Damascus to fully comply with a ceasefire or take tangible steps to fulfil their demands, reports *Al Jazeera*. A rebel official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that at most a handful of rebels might attend, but only if progress was seen in the next two days. Russia had so far failed to yield any tangible steps towards full implementation of the ceasefire, humanitarian aid access, or a release of female detainees the rebels had demanded at the first meeting in the Kazakh capital Astana, he added. "It seems Russian pressure is of no benefit," the rebel official said.<sup>142</sup>

## International Economic Issues

(Dr. Arundhati Sharma)

- Trudeau and Trump Discuss U.S.-Canada Trade

In a joint press conference on February 13, 2017, US President Donald Trump said that the United States would be "tweaking" its trade relationship with Canada, indicating no major realignment. He said, "We have a very outstanding trade relationship with Canada; we'll be tweaking and doing things that benefit both of our countries." Adding that the relationship with Canada was a "much less severe situation than that on our southern border", President Trump continued to state that "our relationship with Canada is outstanding – we'll work together to make it even better." Noteworthy, Trump has announced earlier to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) linking the economies of the United States, Mexico and Canada to make the terms more favorable to Americans.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Loaa Adel, Syrian government says ready for prisoner swaps with rebels, *Iraqi News*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/syrian-government-says-ready-prisoner-swaps-rebels/>, accessed on February 14, 2017

<sup>142</sup> Syria rebels cast doubt on attending Kazakhstan talks, *Al Jazeera*, February 14, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/syria-rebels-cast-doubt-attending-kazakhstan-talks-170214041206288.html>, accessed on February 14, 2017

<sup>143</sup> 'Trump expects only 'tweaking' of trade relationship with Canada,' Reuters, February 13, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-canada-idUSKBN15S14S>

- European Commission upgrades growth forecast for UK economy

According to report by the European Commission, released on February 13, 2017, the UK economy is expected to grow at 1.5% this year, compared with a forecast for just 1% growth made in November last year. The commission forecasts the UK economy losing further momentum in 2018, with growth of just 1.2%, but estimates GDP expanding 2.0% in 2017 and 1.6% in 2018. It forecasts Eurozone economic growth of 1.6% in 2017 and 1.8% in 2018, compared with 1.5% and 1.7%, respectively, from the previous year. Unemployment in Eurozone was expected to drop from 10.0% in 2016 to 9.6% this year and 9.1% in 2018. The commission forecast eurozone inflation would increase from 0.2% in 2016 to 1.7% in 2017 and then ease back to 1.4% in 2018.<sup>144</sup>

- European Parliament passes EU-Canada free trade deal amid protests

The European parliament on February 15, 2017, passed the EU-Canada free trade deal. The deal is considered to be significant in the wake of growing US protectionism under the government of Donald Trump. The agreement aims to eliminate 98% of tariffs on exported goods, making it the EU's most comprehensive trade deal to date. Trade between the two sides amounts to more than 60 billion euros (C\$83bn) a year, and the EU expects the so-called Ceta deal (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement) to boost this by 20% by removing almost all tariffs. It has been claimed by its supporters that the pact will be worth £1.3bn (C\$2.1bn, \$1.6bn) a year to Britain alone, in the period before the UK withdraws from the EU. Despite the concerns arising from protestors attempting to disrupt the deal, MEPs in Strasbourg approved the pact with 408 votes in favour, 254 against and 33 abstentions.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Katie Allen, 'European commission upgrades growth forecast for UK economy', The Guardian, February 13, 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/feb/13/european-commission-upgrades-growth-forecast-uk-economy>

<sup>145</sup> Daniel Boffey, 'European parliament passes EU-Canada free trade deal amid protests', The Guardian, February 15, 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/feb/15/ceta-trade-deal-canada-eu-passed-european-parliament>