

Quarterly Round Up

Mr. Usama Bin Ashraf*

US' Withdrawal from INF Treaty

On Feb 1, 2019, President of USA, Donald Trump, announced America's withdrawal from Intermediate Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF) with Russia. He said, "Moscow has been cheating for years on the 1987 pact." INF Treaty was signed between the then American President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev on December 08, 1987, on the elimination of their intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles. The INF Treaty banned all of the two nations' land-based ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and missile launchers with ranges of 500–1,000 kilometres (short medium-range) and 1,000–5,500 km (intermediate-range). U.S. officials since 2014 have accused Moscow of breaching the INF Treaty, specifically through the deployment of a cruise missile known as the Novator 9M729. NATO said that it "fully supports" Mr. Trump's move. Russia's top negotiator on the pact denied that Russia had violated the terms of the INF and said Moscow was still willing to abide by its terms despite the US withdrawal.

Qatar Withdraw from OPEC

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is an intergovernmental organization of 14 nations, founded on 14 September 1960 in Baghdad. The aim and objective of OPEC includes "to coordinate and unify petroleum policies among member countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers; an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations." Qatar joined OPEC in 1961 and recently Qatar has announced it withdraw from OPEC from January 2019 to more focus on production of natural gas. It makes Qatar first Gulf country to leave OPEC bloc of oil producing countries led by Saudi Arabia.

Explaining the motivation behind the decision, Saad Sherida al-Kaabi, Qatar's minister of state for energy affairs and president and CEO of Qatar Petroleum, said that Qatar's exit from OPEC "is not political, it

* Research Associate at MUSLIM Institute, Islamabad

was purely a business decision for Qatar's future strategy towards the energy sector." Qatar takes its decision as a, "more focus on production of natural gas" because Qatar is World largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LPG) and 17th largest producer of crude oil (around 600,000 barrels per day). It also only holds around 2% of world global oil reserves.

The withdraw decision reflects Qatar desire to more focus its efforts on plans to develop and increases it's natural gas production from 77 million tonnes per year to 110 million tonnes in the coming year. Being part of OPEC it's oil production was steady with limited prospects for increases. Since 2013, amount of oil Qatar produced has steadily declined from about 728,000 barrels per day (2013) to about 607,000 barrels per day (2017) or just fewer than 2% of Opec's total output.

Christchurch Mosque Shootings

On Mar 15, 2019 Forty-nine people have been killed and 48 wounded in shootings at two mosques during Friday Prayer in Christchurch, New Zealand .The attacks began at the Al Noor Mosque in the suburb of Riccarton at 1:40 PM and continued at Linwood Islamic Centre at about 1:55 PM. The gunman live-streamed the first attack on Facebook. Brenton Tarrant, a 28-year-old man from Grafton, New South Wales, Australia, described in media reports as a white supremacist and part of the alt-right, was arrested and initially charged with one murder. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern described it as a terrorist attack and one of New Zealand's "darkest days". The gunman, armed with semi-automatic rifles including an AR-15, is believed to have modified his weapons with high-capacity magazines - the part of the gun which stores ammunition - so they could hold more bullets. Politicians and world leaders condemned the attacks.

Brexit Saga Continues

On 23 June 2016, the British people settled a question that had rumbled under the surface of UK politics for a generation: should the country remain within the European Union or leave, so it seemed when 51.9% voted to leave and 48.1% voted to remain. However, years after the vote and deep into the departure process, argument continues about

the pros and cons of quitting the EU – and what Brexit will mean for the UK. A number of options have already been exhausted in the Brexit Saga, although several still remain on the table. It remains to be seen whether the UK government will be able to secure a new agreement with EU, or whether the UK will crash without a deal in place.

Charges on Chinese Firm Huawei

The US Justice Department has filed a host of criminal charges against Chinese telecoms giant Huawei. The indictment alleges Huawei misled the US and a global bank about its relationship with two subsidiaries, Huawei Device USA and Skycom Tech, to conduct business with Iran. Moreover, the US and other Western nations have been concerned that the Chinese government could use Huawei's technology to expand its spying ability, although the firm insists there is no government control and deny the allegations. The case could ratchet up tensions between China and the US, and impact the firm's global expansion efforts.

Ethiopian Airline Crash

Ethiopian plane crash was one of the most deadliest crashes in the world; UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described it as a “global tragedy”. Passengers from 35 countries were on board from Addis Ababa to Nairobi that crashed on 10 March, killing 157 people. According to Ethiopian Airlines' chief executive, the aircraft, a Boeing 737 MAX 8, took off at 8:38 AM and lost contact with air traffic control six minutes later, crashing near Bishoftu, less than 40 miles southeast of Addis Ababa. It was not immediately clear what caused the crash of the plane.

Pulwama Attack

On February 14, 2019, in Pulwama District of Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir, a convoy of vehicles carrying Indian security personnel was attacked by a suicide bomber. Resultantly, 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed. Soon after the incident, India started blaming Pakistan for the attack. Pakistan condemned the attack and categorically rejected false Indian allegations about the Pulwama attack, which had an indigenous origin, including the

use of local explosives and vehicle, miles away from LoC. Pakistan's PM Imran Khan called on India to provide evidence about the involvement of Pakistan.

India-Pakistan Border Skirmish

On February 19, 2019, Pakistan's PM told about the Indian government's desire to attack Pakistan owing to the upcoming elections. Similar situation happened on February 26, 2019 when jets of Indian Air Force IAF crossed the Line of Control in Balakot (KPK) Area and dropped their payloads. India claimed that it attacked a Jaish-e-Mohammed training camp and killed a large number of terrorists. Pakistan rejected the claims and said that they quickly scrambled jets to intercept the IA jets, which dropped their payloads to quickly return over the Line of Control. On 27 February, Pakistan Air Force conducted multiple airstrikes into Occupied Jammu and Kashmir in retaliation for the Indian airstrike the day before. In an ensuing dogfight between Indian and Pakistani jets, Pakistan Air Force destroyed two Indian planes; an Indian MiG-21 was shot down over Pakistan and its pilot captured and other fell down inside of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. On 28 February 2019, Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan announced at a joint sitting of the Parliament of Pakistan that the government had decided to release Abhinandan the next day as a "gesture of peace".