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# Strategic Digest

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**America Establishes Space Force**

**New European Union Policy Measures on 5G**

**Malaysia Issues First Ever Defence White Paper**

**Army-Judiciary Tussle in Pakistan**

**CPEC and Triangular Politics among China, Pakistan and America**

**Saudi Arabia's Military Base on Zuqar Island**

**15th Manama Dialogue**

## America Establishes Space Force

President Donald Trump signed the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, which included a direction for establishing the United States Space Force (USSF) as the sixth branch of the US armed forces. USSF is the first new armed force to be established in the United States since the United States Air Force was authorised by the National Security Act of 1947. Its establishment is also the most significant reorganisation of the US Department of Defense since the Goldwater-Nichols Reorganisation Act of 1986.



USSF will absorb all personnel (about 16,000 civilian and military) of what was hitherto the US Air Force's Space Command. The Space Command itself will remain as a combatant command and continue to serve as the Department of Defense's warfighting arm in space. USSF's responsibilities, like those of the other services, are organisation, training and equipment. According to the memorandum issued by the US Secretary of Defense, the USSF will be built up on the basis of joint principles while at the same time fostering a mission and culture that are unique to space operations. It will cultivate space-domain specific expertise, remain mission focused, and develop and integrate the doctrine, capabilities and personnel essential to meet future space threats.

The need for a separate Space Force was articulated by President Trump at a meeting of the National Space Council in June 2018. Subsequently, in August 2018, Vice President Mike Pence officially unveiled plans for the US Space Force. The counter-space technologies that China and Russia are developing and the threats posed have prompted the US decision.

## New European Union Policy Measures on 5G

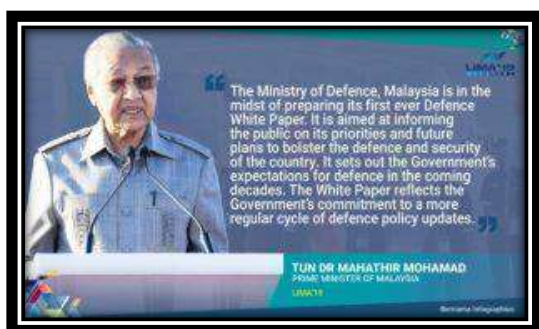


Against the backdrop of espionage concerns arising out of Huawei's 5G equipment, the United States has exerted pressure on its allies to exclude Huawei from their 5G roll outs. Germany has been the most resistant to US pressure, despite threats of scaling back the sharing of sensitive information. Germany's Federal Network Agency, Bundesnetzagentur, also took the stance that "no equipment supplier, including Huawei, should, or may, be specifically excluded."

Against this backdrop, Chancellor Angela Merkel has called European Union Member States to set up a dedicated agency to certify components for 5G networks. Certification requirements would apply to all imported equipment, irrespective of the country of origin – essentially using a single yardstick. Member States are also due to agree on EU-level measures to mitigate 5G cybersecurity risks, which include laying down certification requirements, testing stipulations, and identifying suppliers considered “non-secure.” While EU Member States would continue to pursue an independent China policy, these new measures are likely to pave the way for a unified EU policy on 5G security.

### Malaysia Issues First Ever Defence White Paper

Malaysia has issued its first ever Defence White Paper. It is structured in three parts – Vision, Strategy and Implementation, corresponding to the ends, ways and means of defending the country’s national interests.



Part I sets out the national and defence visions and provides an assessment of the strategic outlook. It envisages Malaysia as “a bridging lynchpin between the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region”, given its geographical location connecting the Asian mainland with island states and maritime powers. The White Paper

identifies three security challenges: 1) uncertain relationship between big powers (America and China in particular), 2) complex Southeast Asian neighbourhood, and 3) non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, cyber insecurity, and maritime challenges. Part II of the Defence White Paper outlines Malaysia’s three-pillared defence strategy. Concentric Deterrence, the principal pillar, seeks to dissuade external intervention by projecting defence capabilities. Comprehensive Defence, the second pillar, aims to strengthen the internal foundations of external defence. Credible Partnerships, the third pillar, has the goal of boosting the other two pillars by strengthening external security conditions and increasing strategic options. Part III of the White Paper details plans to foster defence science, technology and industry, reform the defence apparatus, improve governance, and secure stable funding for defence.

The Mahathir Mohamad government drew up the Defence White Paper to align Malaysia’s emerging vision and defence posture with its longstanding security policy and foreign policy priorities in the context of the complex and uncertain strategic environment emerging in Asia and beyond. In addition, the government is also seeking to foster security consciousness and readiness among the people as well as usher in a whole-of-the-government approach for ensuring coherent responses to security challenges.

## Army-Judiciary Tussle in Pakistan

On 17 December 2019, a Special Court of the Supreme Court of Pakistan held former President, General Pervez, Musharraf guilty (in absentia) of high treason for subverting the Constitution and trampling upon human rights and the rule of law, and sentenced him to death under Article 6 of the Constitution. This is an extraordinary and unprecedented verdict. In the past, the Pakistan Judiciary had always sanctified military coups under the doctrine of necessity. This, together with the Supreme Court's ruling questioning the reappointment of the present Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, and extension of his term for three years, raises the possibility of an erosion in the military's preponderance in Pakistan's power structure.



It is unlikely that the Court's verdict would ever be implemented. The verdict is more symbolic in nature. It is indicative of an intuitional tussle, with the Judiciary asserting its rightful place as an independent institution. Whether the verdict would deter future army chiefs from usurping power from democratically elected governments remains to be seen.

Reactions from the Pakistan military have been on expected lines, dismissing the suggestion that a former army chief who had fought wars to defend the country and served as president could ever be considered a traitor. There have also been many pro-Musharraf protests across the country, denoting the existence of a lasting political constituency loyal to the army. The ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government, known for its proximity to the establishment, is expected to stand by Musharraf and appeal against the verdict. Although the liberal class in Pakistan including opposition political parties have welcomed the verdict, the language used by the special court has been regarded by many as unnecessary.

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## CPEC and Triangular Politics among China, Pakistan and America



Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies

On 21 November 2019, Alice Wells, US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, expressed scepticism about the viability of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), warning that it could sink Pakistan in heavy debt. Pakistan Foreign Minister Qureshi and Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang rejected her views. The latter, especially, condemned Wells' remarks as incorrect and a "mere repetition of old slanders" against China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Given its close relationship with the United States, Pakistan cannot ignore Wells' sharp criticism of CPEC. With US-China

relations taking a turbulent turn and the US regaining some leverage over Pakistan after the IMF sanctioned a US\$ 6 billion loan with the added stipulation that the money should not be used to repay CPEC loans, the triangular politics among China, Pakistan and the United States appears set to take an interesting turn. Further, Wells' comments are likely to provide further traction to domestic constituencies within Pakistan that have long questioned the feasibility of CPEC.

### Saudi Arabia's "Military Base" on Zuqar Island

Saudi Arabia has reportedly stationed some 50 soldiers in the island of Zuqar in the Red Sea. This has led to speculation that it may be building a permanent military base on the island. Zuqar is located 35 kilometres west of the Yemeni coast in the Red Sea. Its strategic importance stems from its location near the Bab al-Mandab Strait which links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and is an important choke point along international sea lanes of communication.



Zuqar had come under the control of the Saudi-led coalition in September 2016 after it intervened in the Yemeni civil war. It was mainly guarded by UAE forces thereafter. As part of its July 2019 decision to withdraw from the Yemen conflict, the UAE handed over control of the island to the Yemeni Coast Guard in October. The UAE has

trained more than 1,500 Yemeni Coast Guard troops to combat piracy and terrorist threats to the Bab al-Mandab and handed over control of military equipment including vessels and reconnaissance assets.

There has been no official statements or suggestions that Saudi Arabia might be considering the establishment of a long-term military presence on Zuqar. What appears more likely is a temporary presence to monitor and secure the Bab al-Mandab from piracy and terrorist threats until the final resolution of the Yemeni civil war.

### 15th Manama Dialogue

The Middle East Security Summit took place in Bahrain on 22-24 November 2019. Delegates from 41 countries participated in the dialogue.



A major topic of discussion was the key role played by Iran in the region and the lack of unity among Gulf countries in dealing with Iran. Another important topic was the increasing influence of China and Russia in the affairs of the region, even as US civilian and military officials articulated their

continued commitment to allies in the region. A third highlight of the Dialogue was geo-economics of the Middle East and in particular the transition from the old transactional buyer-seller relationship between Gulf countries and Asian economies to joint investment in each other's economies.

### **Jihadist Attack on Niger Military Camp**

On 11 December 2019, militants affiliated to the Islamic State in West Africa, or ISWAP, a Boko Haram splinter faction, attacked an army base in Niger, killing 71 soldiers. Terror attacks on military and civilian facilities in the Sahel region of Western Africa are not uncommon. Since 2012, when Tuareg separatist militants gained control of the northern Mali, the Liptako-Gourma region stretching across Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali has been an epicentre of violence and insurgency. Conflict assumed a religio-political dimension when Tuareg militants sought affiliation with Islamist groups and, for their part, al Qaeda and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria sought to establish a sanctuary in the Sahel region. The situation worsened post the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and Libya's descent into civil war.



The mode of operation of these terror groups in Africa has been very similar to that of the ISIS in West Asia: targeting of public institutions and paralyzing the administrative apparatus. The 11 December attack came on the eve of a planned summit between France and the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel countries from West Africa to take stock of the security situation in the region.

While the summit stands postponed, the attack demonstrated the inability of the French-backed G5 Sahel group, which was established in 2014 and which has maintained a Cross Border Joint Force since 2017, to deter terrorist groups in the region. The biggest impediment confronting the group comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger is shortage of funds including for development programmes and governance initiatives.