

THE FUTURE INSTITUTE

THE FUTURE

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The Future is a newsletter periodically published by The Future Institute. This newsletter aims to chronicle the significant events and developments in the societies of the emerging nations with the potential of impacting their future. This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.

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Russia-Ukraine Crisis and NATO: Towards War or Diplomacy?

Tensions have been steadily building up between NATO and Russia on the latter's military escalation vis-a-vis Ukraine, a European Union-NATO ally. In the short term, the tensions can be traced back to Ukraine's 2014 Revolution of Dignity, which saw months-long protests topple erstwhile pro-Moscow Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had used the power vacuum to annex Crimea and back separatists in the south-eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, setting off a conflict that has led to the death of more than 13,000 people. The 2014 Russian annexation has been a major factor in pushing Ukraine towards the EU-NATO camp, and the country is in preparation to formally apply for E.U. membership in 2024, in order to join the European Union in the 2030s. Moreover, Ukraine today is in a much stronger position militarily, especially with its latest military inclusion of the 'game-changing' Turkish made Bayraktar drones.

Russia, on its part, has been steadily building up its troop presence in the border areas with Ukraine over the past few months, in a move that threatens invasion, unless 'legal guarantees' are given that NATO will not expand eastward. Additionally, Russia has also been making steady progress in bolstering relations with India, deepening ties with China, and has also been accused of orchestrating the migrant crisis at the Belarus-Poland border, although Putin has strongly denied such allegations. It may be mentioned that such moves appear to be connected with giving Russia an upper hand in the geopolitical wrangling that has unfolded with the crisis against the U.S., E.U. and NATO in Ukraine.

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TRT World Forum: a Major Event on Affairs of Muslim World

The TRT World Forum 2021 was virtually organised on 19th-20th October 2021 from Istanbul, with the participation of global leaders, academics, journalists and experts on global issues. The two-day event was held with a view to grapple with the challenges of the current time and contribute to advancing peace, security and prosperity throughout the world, and was attended by about 100 national and international experts, including academics, journalists, politicians, policy practitioners, and members of the civil society from more than 36 countries.

The theme for 2021 was “Power and Paradox: Understanding Grand Strategy in the 21st Century.” In line with the theme, the conference began with the speech of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who stressed on the need for justice and equality in a world rife with Islamophobia and the failure of traditionally West-based global institutions to counter global injustice and inequality. The opening session was followed by a keynote speech by Turkish FM Mevlut Cavusoglu, who stressed Ankara’s success in utilising smart power in its grand strategy, combining soft and hard power elements. The sessions and discussions featured this year included discussions on sovereignty in an increasingly interdependent world, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the future of Turkish-Arab Relations, climate change and global health crises as strategic threats, foreign policy and grand strategies of Europe, U.S., Russia, and Turkey, and challenges and opportunities in Global Governance and Multipolarity.

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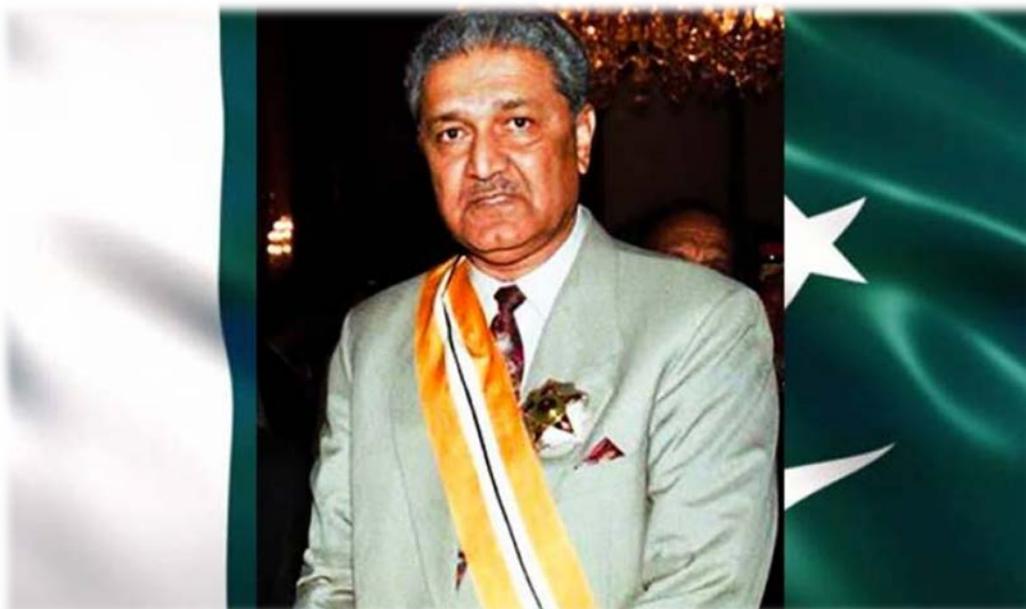
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Death of Pakistani Nuclear Scientist Abul Qadeer Khan

Popularly dubbed as the 'father of the Pakistan nuclear program,' well known Pakistani nuclear physicist and metallurgist Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan passed away on October 10, 2021. He was head of the Khan Research Laboratories (KRL), which along with other agencies, helped Pakistan in achieving nuclear capability through the 1980s, and tested its first nuclear weapon in 1998. The Pakistani nuclear program came in response to India's nuclear program, which had tested its first nuclear weapon in 1974, just a few years after India had played a significant military role in the breakup of Pakistan in 1971.

Khan's role came at a time when obtaining nuclear capability was an issue of maintaining Pakistani sovereignty in the face of looming Indian nuclear aggression, which is why he is seen as a public hero in Pakistan and an icon of excellence in the larger Muslim world. However beyond his technical and scientific contribution, Khan was at the heart of a highly secret network of supply and procurement of supplies for the program, an endeavour fraught with danger - he barely escaped being the target of a Mossad assassination plot.

In 2004, Khan confessed on national television to being part of a nuclear proliferation ring and unconditionally apologised for transferring nuclear technology to enemies of Israel such as Iran and Libya, and also North Korea, throughout the 1990s. The public confession was a major embarrassment for the then Musharraf administration, which had him questioned in security debriefings and placed under watch and movement restrictions. However, he was eventually pardoned, and his security debriefing stopped in 2008. Khan remains the only citizen of Pakistan to have been honoured twice with the country's highest civilian award, the Nishan-e-Imtiaz.

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Declassifying the archives is an important step towards a better understanding of the war, according to Benjamin Stora, a leading French historian of Algeria [File: Jacques Grevin/AFP]

France to Open Classified Algerian Independence War Archives

In a move that has been welcomed by historians and could potentially revive French-Algerian relations, the French government has announced that it will declassify the most highly classified parts of its national archives about the Algerian war of independence. The files cover judicial proceedings by the French police and military forces during the 1954-1962 war of independence and are purported to be some of the darkest chapters in 20th-century French colonial history. According to Benjamin Stora, a leading French historian of Algeria, this step towards declassifying the archives is important for a better understanding of the Algerian independence war and its period and the bloody and brutal role of the French government in torturing and executing Algerian revolutionaries during this period.

The announcement comes after the French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian's visit to Algiers, where he held talks with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune with the aim of reviving dialogue between the two sides. Algerian officials have also welcomed a statement by Macron's office regretting previous comments made in relation to French colonial presence in Algeria in the 20th century. Relations between the two countries had deteriorated sharply in October of this year after French President Emmanuel Macron accused Algeria's "political-military system" of rewriting history and fomenting "hatred towards France". In blunt comments deemed offensive to Algerians, Macron also questioned whether Algeria had existed as a nation before the French invasion in the 1800s. The comments had sparked a fierce reaction from Algeria, which withdrew its ambassador and banned French military planes from its airspace, setting forth a diplomatic crisis between the two nations.

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Aid Cut-off may Kill more Afghans than War

Amidst worsening humanitarian crises in Afghanistan, the U.N. Security Council has adopted a resolution introduced by the U.S. aimed at facilitating aid to Afghanistan. The news comes at a time when war and international sanctions in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover last September have left the country dangerously near a humanitarian disaster and economic collapse. Additionally, the U.S. Treasury Department announced it was issuing special licenses to ensure that some international aid could flow to Afghanistan.

The licenses will enable the U.S. government, the U.N., and some NGOs to operate in the country, offer humanitarian assistance despite sanctions, and allow Afghans living abroad to send money to their families in Afghanistan through remittances. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid welcomed the development and hoped they would lead to a complete withdrawal of financial sanctions against the new Afghan government led by the Taliban.

However, the new developments do not address the nearly \$10bn worth of Afghan central bank reserves blocked by the U.S. The move comes amid regional and international calls to urgently address the desperate humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, in what activists have been calling an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe, which, if not addressed, may lead to the deaths of more people in 2022 than in the last 20 years of warfare combined. It is notable that even before the incoming Taliban regime, roughly 75 per cent of Afghanistan government expenditures, including healthcare, were previously directly funded by international aid.

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In their distinctive black uniforms, black headscarves and wraparound sunglasses, the force are as intimidating as they are clearly identifiable [Sony Ramany/NurPhoto via Getty Images]

U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Top Officials of Bangladesh Elite Force RAB over Human Rights Abuse

In a move that brings to light large-scale human rights abuses in Bangladesh, the U.S. government has imposed sanctions on seven former and current high-level officials of Bangladesh's paramilitary force, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), over allegations of large-scale human rights abuse. The move has been welcomed by rights activists, who have called for the disbandment of RAB, and the review of Bangladesh's participation in U.N. led global peacekeeping operations. The U.S. also imposed similar sanctions on China, Myanmar, and North Korean officials alongside RAB.

It is notable that among the officials, the highest-level official placed under Global Magnitsky human rights-related sanctions by the U.S. Department of Treasury is the current inspector-general of police and former director-general of RAB Benazir Ahmed, who has also been barred from travelling to the U.S. However, such high-level officials often do not work alone but as part of an administration that promotes and encourages such mass level human rights abuses, as identified in the recent Aljazeera criminal investigative series "All the Prime Minister's Men." It is notable that since it was established in April 2004, RAB has been regularly accused of serious human rights violations and abuse of power and has often been identified by human rights organisations as the key player in extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances.

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A new round of talks on reviving the Iran nuclear deal is set to begin in Vienna on November 29, 2021 [File: Reuters]

Iran Nuclear Deal: Where is it Heading towards?

On May 8 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the United States was pulling out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear agreement it had signed with Iran on July 14 2015, alongside China, France, Germany, Russia and the U.K. Fast forward to 2021 and talks in Vienna to salvage the Iran nuclear deal are ongoing. However, the mood is not one of hope but resignation in the knowledge that talks are most likely to fail. This is mainly due to the absence of the U.S. from the talks; the Biden administration, instead of turning over a new leaf, had maintained the position of its predecessor, reiterating the language of threats, intimidation, sanctions, etc., to stop Iran from enriching its uranium stocks to weapons-grade uranium.

The problem is that after the unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, Iran has come closer than before to obtaining 90% enriched uranium, in which case the grounds for a nuclear deal could simply cease to exist in the near future. The U.S. attitude towards the JCPOA has not only been subject to criticism by Iran, which has borne the brunt of stringent U.S. restrictions in return for signing the deal, and later crippling sanctions in lieu of unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the treaty, but also by experts who have highlighted U.S. double standards in this regard.

It has been pointed out that Iran, as a signatory of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), with the right to utilise uranium for civilian energy purposes, does not deserve to bear such crippling U.S. sanctions when U.S. ally Israel, which is not a signatory to the NPT, already possesses nuclear facilities and weapons, and does not get sanctioned for it. Moreover, the last time the U.N. General Assembly fielded a proposition on a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East in 2018, it passed by a margin of 171-2, the only countries against it being the United States and Israel. And Iran has consistently voted for a nuclear-weapons-free zone proposition every time.

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