

Headlines:

- **Time Is Ripe for a Saudi-Qatar Reconciliation**
- **US Intelligence Head says China is America's 'Greatest Threat' in Rare Public Warning**
- **Pakistan to Launch Train Service with Afghanistan**

Details:

Time Is Ripe for a Saudi-Qatar Reconciliation

It looks like the Trump administration's effort to get some important last-minute gains in the Middle East is paying off. On a trip to the region this week, the president's son-in-law and Middle East envoy, Jared Kushner, is reported to have engineered a preliminary agreement between Saudi Arabia and Qatar to end their rift. The key to the potential rapprochement between Riyadh and Doha is the reopening of a crucial flight route through Saudi airspace for Qatari civilian aircraft. This was cut off in June 2017, when Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, began an economic embargo on Qatar. The loss of overflight rights has been by far the biggest practical blow to Qatar from the embargo, and their restoration would represent a major breakthrough. A bonus for the Saudis would be depriving their arch-enemy Iran of the \$100 million a year Qatar pays for alternative routes over Iranian airspace. Given the impact of U.S. sanctions on the Islamic Republic, those payments are a vital source of foreign exchange that the regime in Tehran can ill afford to lose. It is unclear what Qatar will agree to do in return. The original list of 13 demands from the boycotting nations included the shuttering of the Doha-based Al Jazeera network, the closure of a Turkish military base in Qatar and a scaling down of ties with Iran. At the very least, Riyadh will expect the Qataris to forswear activities that might conflict with Saudi interests and anything that smacks of meddling in Saudi domestic politics. For the Trump administration, getting Qatar back into the Gulf Arab fold is part of a broader push to strengthen the coalition against Iran, and to make it harder for President-elect Joe Biden to reverse Trump's confrontational policies and return to the diplomatic outreach of the Barack Obama years. A raft of last-minute additional sanctions on Tehran are part of that effort, as undoubtedly is the assassination — presumably by Israel — of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the scientist who led Iran's nuclear-weapons program. The intention is to leave Biden with the most tense and confrontational relationship with Iran possible, short of open conflict. [Source: Bloomberg]

America's interference in the GCC has reached new heights, as it is able to change the destiny of Muslim nations at will. This is mainly due to the cowardice leadership of the GCC. Only the re-establishment of Khilafah Rashidah (rightly guided Caliphate) upon the method of the Prophethood can spare the GCC such humiliation and put it permanently on the course of independence from Western powers.

US Intelligence Head says China is America's 'Greatest Threat' in Rare Public Warning

Top US government officials issued stark warnings about China on Thursday, with the head of Washington's intelligence community calling China America's "greatest threat" and the Pentagon's top general saying that the US must boost its technological prowess to defend against Beijing's efforts to "dominate" US military forces. "I am entrusted with access to more intelligence than any member of the US government other than the president," Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe, said in an opinion piece published by The Wall Street Journal, a rare public warning from his office. "The People's Republic of China poses the greatest threat to America today, and the greatest threat to democracy and freedom worldwide since World War II. "Beijing intends to dominate the US and the rest of the planet economically, militarily and technologically," Ratcliffe added. "Many of China's major public initiatives and prominent companies offer only a layer of camouflage to the activities of the Chinese Communist

Party.” Using similar language at the US Naval Institute’s Online Defense Forum to characterise the military threat that China poses, Joint Chiefs Chairman General Mark Milley said the country “would like to not only match us but exceed us, dominate us, be able to beat us in armed conflict by mid-century”. Ratcliffe cited cases of industrial espionage and referenced alleged payments that the Chinese government made to Charles Lieber, the indicted former chairman of Harvard University’s chemistry department, as evidence of a wide-ranging effort to “rob, replicate and replace” American companies, resulting in damages equivalent to as much as US\$500 billion a year. The comments by America’s top intelligence official come as US courts work through dozens of indictments that the Justice Department has brought against Chinese researchers in the country in addition to Lieber. John Demers, chief of the US Justice Department’s National Security Division, said in a discussion hosted by the Aspen Institute think tank on Wednesday that more than 1,000 Chinese researchers have left the US amid his department’s initiative to uncover espionage emanating from Beijing. On the diplomatic front, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo this year ordered senior Chinese diplomats based in the US to seek his department’s permission before meeting with local government officials or visiting American university campuses. A representative of Beijing’s embassy in Washington called Ratcliffe’s comments “fact-distorting” and part of US government attempts to contain China. Ratcliffe “is well aware that it is the US government and relevant companies that have been for a long time mounting a large-scale, organized and indiscriminate cyber theft, surveillance and attack,” the representative said. “It is nothing secret that no one deserves the title of Empire of Hacking and Spying better than the US.” Milley said the US military must embrace robotics and artificial intelligence more fully, and boost its naval fleet to more than 500 vessels by 2045, from around 300 currently. At least one quarter of these vessels should be unmanned, robotic ships, and as many as 90 submarines, he said. [Source: South Morning Sea Post]

The Trump administration is doing its utmost to ensure that Biden is handed a great advantage in forging relations with China. It is expected that very little will change under Biden regarding US foreign policy with China.

Pakistan to Launch Train Service with Afghanistan

Pakistan Railways has announced plans to construct a rail link with neighbouring Afghanistan to improve trade and facilitate passengers. The railway track will connect Pakistan’s Chaman district of Balochistan with the Spin Boldak town of Kandahar in Afghanistan, Minister for Railways Sheikh Rashid Ahmed announced at a press conference in Quetta. In the first phase, at least 11km-long railway track will be laid from Chaman to Spin Boldak, he said. After its completion, the railway track could be extended to Kandahar city if the Afghan government expressed its willingness, Rashid added. The proposed rail project has been pending for the past many years. Linking Chaman with Spin Boldak through the proposed railroad would help boost trade between the two neighbours, the minister said. Islamabad recently restored trade operations with Afghanistan at five border routes - Chaman, Torkham, Angor Adda, Ghulam Khan and Kharlachi. Pakistan’s Commerce and Investment Adviser Abdul Razak Dawood last month visited Kabul and held extensive discussions with Afghan trade officials to resolve issues related to trade and transportation. He expressed hope that Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) and Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) will be finalised between the two countries by the end of January 2021. Earlier this year, Pakistani also launched the first train service to exclusively transport Afghan transit cargo from Pakistan’s southern port city of Karachi to Afghanistan border. In 2019, Pakistan government approved a supplementary grant of Rs500 million for the construction for an additional carriageway on the Torkham-Jalalabad road under the Prime Minister’s Reconstruction of Afghanistan Program. [Source: Gulf News]

Ostensibly, Pakistan’s latest initiative is in response to countering growing ties between Afghanistan and India. The only way for Pakistan to compete with India, is for Islamabad to reintegrate Afghanistan with the country. This reintegration drive should not be limited to security such as the infamous “strategic depth” but must encompass all fields of life. The practical way to accomplish this is through the re-establishment of Khilafah Rashidah (rightly guided Caliphate) upon the method of the Prophethood.