

Headlines:

- **Florida Naval Base Shooting: Saudi Student Assailed US as Nation of Evil**
- **US Considers Sending Thousands More Troops to Middle East to Deter Iran**
- **US Welcomes Moody's Upgrade in Pakistan's Credit Outlook**

Details:

Florida Naval Base Shooting: Saudi Student Assailed US as Nation of Evil

A Saudi military student reportedly condemned America as a "nation of evil" in an online manifesto prior to opening fire Friday at a US naval base, killing three people before being shot dead by police. The shooting, which took place in a classroom building at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida, left eight others wounded, including two sheriff's deputies who responded to the attack. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said the shooter was from Saudi Arabia -- the same nationality as 15 of the 19 men involved in the 9/11 attacks, some of whom attended civilian flight school in Florida. The SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors jihadist media, identified him as Mohammed al-Shamrani, saying he had posted a short manifesto on Twitter that read: "I'm against evil, and America as a whole has turned into a nation of evil." "I'm not against you for just being American, I don't hate you because your freedoms, I hate you because every day you supporting, funding and committing crimes not only against Muslims but also humanity," he wrote. ABC News reported that investigators were working to determine if it was in fact written by the shooter. The Twitter account that posted the manifesto -- which also condemned US support for Israel and included a quote from Al-Qaeda's deceased leader, the Saudi Osama bin Laden -- has been suspended. DeSantis told a news conference that "the government of Saudi Arabia needs to make things better for these victims. And I think they are going to owe a debt here given that this is one of their individuals." Commanding officer Captain Timothy Kinsella said the shooter was an aviation trainee, one of "a couple hundred" foreign students at the base. Saudi Arabia's King Salman telephoned US President Donald Trump to denounce the shooting, affirming that "the perpetrator of this heinous crime does not represent the Saudi people," according to the official Saudi Press Agency. Saudi Arabia has long been a major US ally in the Middle East, thanks primarily to security considerations and oil. Trump said King Salman "called to express his sincere condolences and give his sympathies to the families and friends of the warriors who were killed and wounded in the attack that took place in Pensacola, Florida." [Source: France 24]

No matter how hard Trump and King Salman try to play down the incident, there is increasing realization that the Saudi people vehemently oppose close ties with America. The stationing of US troops in the Kingdom and the rapid westernization of Saudi society is bound to precipitate more such incidents both at home and abroad.

US Considers Sending Thousands More Troops to Middle East to Deter Iran

The Pentagon is considering sending thousands more troops to the Middle East as part of an effort to beef up air defense capabilities in the face of Iranian moves that include its recent transfer of short-range missiles into Iraq, CNN has learned from multiple defense officials. The most realistic options include potentially sending 4,000 to 7,000 additional US troops to the region, the officials said. The Iranian missiles could pose a threat to US forces in Iraq and potentially be moved to threaten Saudi Arabia as well, officials say. The need for

additional air defenses could be met by combinations of ground-, air- and sea-based US forces. The Pentagon officials said discussions underway now are focusing first on what additional military capabilities are needed to deter Iran and how long those assets and troops might be required. Once those military capabilities are determined, that will determine how many troops are needed, officials say. No decisions have been made. They also say new deployments could start with an even lower number, somewhere in the range of 3,000 to 4,000 troops. The news that the US might substantially boost troops in the Middle East because of Iran comes as the Pentagon told reporters Thursday that it is concerned about the "threat stream" coming from the country. CNN reported Wednesday that US intelligence agencies and the Pentagon in recent weeks have tracked the movement of a number of Iranian short-range ballistic missiles into Iraq. News of the movement of Iranian missiles into Iraq came after CNN reported that there is fresh intelligence of a potential Iranian threat against US forces and interests in the Middle East, according to several US defense and administration officials. In November, the US Navy intercepted a ship that it said was carrying Iranian weapons components bound for Yemen. At the same time, France, Germany and the UK have flagged their increasing concerns about Iran's missile program, alleging in a letter to the United Nations that Tehran has developed missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. [Source: CNN]

Despite the increased sabre rattling between US and Iran, the prospect of America invading Iran to change the regime remain dim. This is because the US is reliant on Iran to protect its interests from Lebanon to Yemen. Any increase in US troops is intended to assuage the security of concerns of Saudi Arabia as opposed to preparations for attacking Iran.

US Welcomes Moody's Upgrade in Pakistan's Credit Outlook

Crediting the finance ministry's reform efforts and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, the in-charge of South Asia affairs at the US State Department, Alice Well, last week welcomed Moody's revision in Pakistan's credit outlook. In a tweet shared by the State Department, Acting Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Wells added: "With bold economic reforms, Pakistan can boost growth, attract private capital, and expand exports." New York-based credit rating agency Moody's on Monday raised Pakistan's economic outlook from negative to stable on the back of the country's reforms supported by an IMF programme, but kept its credit rating unchanged at B3. The ratings firm said improvements in the balance of payments was a primary driver of the rating action, but added that foreign exchange buffers would still take time to rebuild. The upgrade was welcomed by the Ministry of Finance, which attributed the development to an "improvement in the balance of payments position, supported by policy adjustments and currency flexibility". Addressing a press conference, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Sheikh said: "This report has shown the world that the reforms brought about by Pakistan in its economy are being appreciated by the world's leading financial institutions." Moody's had in June last year lowered Pakistan's outlook to negative from stable owing to erosion in foreign exchange buffers due to heightened external pressures. [Source: The Dawn]

By cutting aggregate demand at the behest of the IMF, it was expected that balance payments would turn positive, and credit rating would become favorable. However, this does not mean that Pakistan's economy is on the path to recovery—from it. The government and the IMF have done nothing to breathe life into Pakistan's declining industrial base and this means that balance of payments deficit will come to haunt Pakistan in the near future.