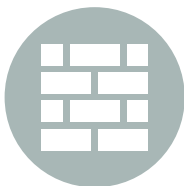


Unsettling times for friends and foes



Bust-up over Mexico wall

On Jan 25, US President Donald Trump ordered the immediate construction of a border wall to keep out illegal migrants from Mexico. After Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto scrapped a Jan 31 meeting with Mr Trump, the White House warned of slapping tariffs on Mexican imports if it refused to pay for the cost of the wall.



Controversy over 'Muslim ban'

On Jan 27, an executive order blocked Syrian refugees from entering the US indefinitely over terrorism concerns. A 90-day ban was also imposed on anyone entering the US from seven predominantly Muslim countries – Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia and Yemen. Critics say Muslims were unfairly targeted.



New Iran sanctions

New sanctions imposed after Mr Trump tweeted last Thursday that "Iran has been put formally put on notice" for firing a ballistic missile the day before. Iran insisted the test did not breach its nuclear agreement with world powers or a UN Security Council resolution endorsing the pact.



Australia agog over phone call

Reports said Mr Trump had a curt exchange with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull on the phone over a refugee resettlement deal. But soon after, Mr Trump denied that there was any testiness. "Thank you to Prime Minister of Australia for telling the truth about our very civil conversation that fake news media lied about. Very nice!" he tweeted.



Japan – friend or foe?

Defence Secretary James Mattis reassured Japan and South Korea of US commitment to their defence during his visit to both countries last week. Yet days earlier, Japan, along with Germany, was ticked off by the Trump administration for currency manipulation.



North Korea put on notice

Mr Mattis warned North Korea on Friday of an "effective and overwhelming" response if it chose to use nuclear weapons. His remarks come amid concern that North Korea could be readying to test a new ballistic missile.



Israel's new settlements

The White House said on Friday that building new settlements in disputed territory in the West Bank may complicate attempts to reach a peace deal with the Palestinians, a break from its previous strong support for Israel on its controversial settlement programme.