

## ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 01-15 FEB 2018

### **CHINA (MARITIME)**

Capt (IN) Ranjit Seth

**Indian Navy Gets Access to Oman Port Duqm.** During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Oman last week the two countries signed an annexure to 'Memorandum of Understanding on Military Cooperation' that would provide India secured access to the Port of Duqm in Oman for military use and logistical support. The Port of Duqm is situated on the southeastern seaboard of Oman, in close proximity to the Chabahar port in Iran. Duqm port and dry dock will be available for maintenance of Indian military vessels.

India and Oman have strong defence relations, including regular joint exercises by the three defence forces, training of Navy, Air and Army personnel as well as cooperation in coastal defence. Incidentally in September last year, India deployed a submarine to this port in the western Arabian Sea.

China's expanding presence in the Indian Ocean Region has nudged India to strengthening security ties with littoral states. With the Assumption Island being developed in Seychelles and Agalega in Mauritius, India's strategy to counter Chinese influence and activities in the region is bolstered.

The above arrangements would enable India to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean region.

**British Warship to Sail Through South China Sea.** British warship HMS Sutherland, an anti-submarine frigate is planned to sail through disputed South China Sea. The warship will sail from Australia through the disputed South China Sea next month to assert freedom of navigation rights.

British Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said about HMS Sutherland, "She'll be sailing through the South China Sea and making it clear our navy has a right to do that "....."We absolutely support the US approach on this, we very much support what the US has been doing." However he did not clarify whether the frigate would sail within 12 nautical miles of a disputed territory or artificial island built by the Chinese, as US ships have done. He further added, "World dynamics are shifting so greatly. The US can only concentrate on so many things at once. The US is looking for other countries to do more. This is a great opportunity for the UK and Australia to do more, to exercise leadership."

In a separate interview Defence Secretary Williamson had warned of the need for vigilance to "any form of malign intent" from China, as it seeks to become a global superpower. "Australia and Britain see China as a country of great opportunities, but we shouldn't be blind to the ambition that China has and we've got to defend our national security interests," he said.

In response, China's foreign ministry spokesman said, "We hope other countries will stop stirring up trouble".

## PAKISTAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

**Pakistan Tightens Noose on UNSC Banned Individuals.** Pakistan's President, Mamnoon Hussain, signed an ordinance that will bring all the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) banned organizations and individuals under the bonds of Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act. The signed ordinance amends a section of the Anti-Terrorism Act of Pakistan. Apart from keeping them under the check, the ordinance also empowers the Islamabad to take action against the UNSC banned groups and individuals. The signed ordinance also includes Hafiz Saeed's group and his terror organizations like Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). The signed ordinance not only enables Islamabad to act against them but to also seal all their offices and freeze their bank accounts.

**Comments.** The move ends an old discrepancy between the UN sanctions list and the national listing of terrorist groups and individuals, has come over a week before the crucial Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meeting in Paris, scheduled to be held from Feb 18 to 23 that will consider a US-sponsored motion to place Pakistan on a list of countries failing to prevent terrorism financing.

**Pakistani Taliban Deputy Khalid Mehsud 'Killed in Drone Attack'.** The Pakistani Taliban deputy Khalid Mehsud, has been killed in a US drone attack. Mehsud was deputy leader of the banned Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the main faction of the hardline Islamist Pakistani Taliban. He was killed in a drone strike in North Waziristan, near the border

**Comments.** Mehsud, also known by his alias Khan Said Sajna, is the most important militant leader to have been killed since the August 2016 killing of Hafiz Saeed Khan, leader of so-called Islamic State in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mehsud has kept militant attacks going not only against military targets in South Waziristan but also at times deeper inside Pakistani territory. Mehsud's death would weaken the Pakistani Taliban.

## AFGHANISTAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

**Kabul Purges Mujahdeen and Soviet-era Army Generals.** A major shakeup at the top level in the Afghan army amid a resilient Taliban revolt has caused shockwaves in the war-stricken country. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani directed the retirement of more than 160 Afghan National Army (ANA) generals last week. The Kabul government has labeled this move part of the broader strategy for reforms in the security sector, and phasing out the older generation of officers.

**Comments.** The latest move is most likely aimed at promoting Western-educated young officers who are accustomed to the new arsenal provided by the US. Under a draft law approved by the Afghan parliament in November last year, as many as

2,000 high-ranking military officers are scheduled to retire in two years. Considering the surging assaults of the Taliban nationwide, particularly in the capital Kabul, many army veterans, politicians, and independent analysts are skeptical of the move.

**China Offers to Build Military Base for Afghan Troops.** China has offered to pay for the construction of a military base for a brigade of troops in Afghanistan's remote northeastern Badakhshan province to prevent militant incursions into its territory. China has proposed to pay the expenses of a brigade, whatever the cost be, and pay for other expenses of the soldiers and Afghanistan will provide troops with arms and logistics with that money. No timescale has been set for construction of the base, and negotiations are continuing. Taliban militants and foreign insurgents from Central Asia and China have established a presence in Badakhshan. The insurgents have carried out a series of bloody attacks on Afghan forces. They are well armed, funded from taxes they levy on local people, especially on the production of lapis lazuli, the semi-precious stone for which the province is famous. The rise of Daesh affiliates there in recent months has been a cause of concern for both China and Russia.

**Comments.** Badakhshan is rugged, remote and mostly impoverished. The proposed site for the military base, the Wakhan Corridor, is inaccessible for much of the year because of heavy snow and the harsh climate. Wakhan borders the restive Chinese province of Xinjiang, where oppression of the largely Muslim population has drawn international condemnation and is viewed as creating a breeding ground for insurgents.

## **NORTHEAST**

Brig HS Cheema

**Nagaland Elections.** A letter written by the Centre's interlocutor R.N. Ravi to the Naga groups, including the NSCN (Isak-Muivah), on 3 Feb helped to end the impasse over the Nagaland Assembly elections. Civil society groups and the NSCN (I-M) had called a boycott of the elections till a political solution was reached. The Election Commission announced the poll schedule on January 19. The poll process started on January 31. The Union government and the NSCN (I-M) had almost sealed the final agreement a day before the Election Commission announced the schedule, but the outfit pulled out at the last moment. Since a compromise on the territorial integrity is out of the question, the outfit was offered a socio-political body like the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee. After agreeing to the terms, the outfit refused to sign the final agreement, leading to the impasse. The Centre has assured the groups that the Assembly will be dissolved as and when the agreement is signed. The groups had apprehensions that the elections would delay the final peace agreement because a newly elected Assembly cannot be dissolved. Govt assured them that if a deal was signed in the next two-three months, the elections would be held afresh. The NSCN (IM) has been fighting for creation of 'Greater Nagaland' or Nagalim by extending the State's borders to cover the Naga-dominated areas in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, uniting 1.2 million Nagas. Assam,

Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, all under the BJP, have refused to part with any land. The Centre is yet to spell out the details of the agreement.

When Nagaland goes to the polls on February 27, former Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio would have no reason to worry about retaining his seat. He has already been declared the winner from the Northern Angami-II seat. Rio's unopposed victory came after his rival from the Naga People's Front (NPF) withdrew his nomination. Rio had quit the NPF last month and joined the newly-formed Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP). The NDPP is a BJP ally. He is in the running for a fourth term as Nagaland Chief Minister.

**Bangladesh Ex PM Khaleda Zia Jailed for Five Years.** Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader and three-time Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was jailed for five years on 8 Feb after being found guilty in a corruption case by a Special Judge's Court in Dhaka. The court also awarded 10-year-sentences to Tarique Rahman Ms. Zia's son and the party's exiled vice-chairman and four others. Amid tight security in key cities across the country, the court convicted Ms. Zia of embezzlement. She was charged with misappropriating Tk 21 million in foreign donations received by the 'Zia Orphanage Trust'. "She was given a shorter term, considering her health and social status," Judge Mohammad Akhteruzzaman said as he passed the sentence. Ms. Zia was later taken to the Old Central Jail on the capital's Nazimuddin Road. The conviction means Ms. Zia, longtime rival of the current Prime Minister, could be barred from running in the December national elections. The present AL party in Govt is likely to benefit from this conviction.

**Rohingya crisis.** Myanmar told the United Nations Security Council on 2 Feb not to visit Myanmar during February this year because it was "not the right time reject the proposed trip. Nearly 690,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to neighboring Bangladesh since Aug. 25 last year after the Myanmar military cracked down on insurgents in Rakhine state. The security forces have been accused by Rohingya witnesses and rights activists of carrying out killings, rapes and arson in Rakhine in a campaign senior officials in the United Nations and United States have described as ethnic cleansing. Myanmar rejects that label and has denied nearly all the allegations. Myanmar is currently organizing a visit for the diplomatic corps in Myanmar to the Rakhine state. Tensions are high in the Rakhine state at the moment, these were the reasons given by the Myanmar authorities. The statement by the council also called on the Myanmar government to give media organizations full and unhindered access throughout the country to ensure the safety and security of media personnel. Two Reuters reporters, Wa Lone, 31, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 27, were detained on 12 Dec. and accused of violating the country's Official Secrets Act.

**Army Chief Gen Bipin Rawat Attends Nepal Army Day Celebrations.** The Nepal army organised its 225th year of celebration and had made vigorous preparations over the time to showcase the activities in the dark with the use of various lighting techniques. Along with the shifting of the time for the celebrations to evening, the Nepal Army invited the Army Chief of Staff General Bipin Rawat this year, who was one amongst the chief guests of the occasion. General Rawat is regarded as the first Head of the Army to be the guest of honour in Nepal Army Day. Nepal and India have the unique tradition of conferring the Head of the Army Staff of both countries with the honorary title of the Army after another Chief of Army Staff takes over the office. India, who also is the biggest arms exporter for Nepal relies on

it for all its military equipments and ammunitions with a treaty signed half century before. In 2014, Nepal finalised the deal to import arms from India.

**Nepal Govt Formation.** Post-election settlement in Nepal is moving forward at a snail's pace, mainly because of the lack of clarity in the constitution. The absolute majority won by the Left Alliance comprising the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre raised the hope of political stability in the country. However, personal and party interests involving actors and political forces have worked against any settlement. Although the Left Alliance has come to an agreement on power-sharing in six of the seven provinces — the UML will lead in four and the Maoists in two — with 70:30 share in the government, the two have not been able to strike a deal regarding government formation at the Centre. A stumbling block is the proposed merger of the two parties, a decision taken by leaders of the two parties before the elections. While Maoist Chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal has agreed to accept UML chief K P Oli as the prime minister, Oli and his party are yet to agree to Dahal's precondition that he be allowed to head the unified party. The disunity is not limited to the Left Alliance. A face-off involving the Nepali Congress and its allies on the one hand and the Hindu nationalist forces on the other seems in the offing. The latter have also rejected the present constitution. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari is set to summon the newly-constituted parliament within a month. The new government is expected to be formed a week after that. The issues and differences among the various parties regarding the constitution will have to be amicably settled before these processes begin. As political uncertainty looms, the army is assuming a visibly pro-active role. The army chief, Rajendra Chhetri, has hosted at least five army chiefs — of Myanmar, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom and India — besides the US Pacific region's four-star general in the past two months. He has also been consulting his predecessors and others on the role of the army should the constitution fail to establish a secular democratic order. The chief of the Indian Army, General Bipin Rawat, who is also an honorary general of the Nepal Army, is being invited to be the special guest on the Nepal Army Day, which is celebrated every year on Mahashivaratri day. Interestingly, it appears that the defence and foreign ministries are not involved in planning these visits. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's day-long visit two weeks ago continues to fuel intense debate and speculation. She had termed it a goodwill visit. In fact, she did make efforts to mend fences with the prime minister in waiting, Oli. However, a section in the CPN-UML believes that she was in Kathmandu to push Dahal's claims to lead a united Communist Party of Nepal. Such a perception will surely have some impact on the merger talks. There are compelling reasons to take Swaraj's outreach to Nepali leaders at face value. From government agencies affiliated with the Indian embassy to the ever-growing RSS network here, many had wrongly concluded that the Nepali Congress was set for another term in office. For now, Oli looks set to become the prime minister in a few weeks, with or without the merger of the two communist parties. However, the Maoists may limit their role in the government to supporting it from the outside if Dahal's demand for the unified party's leadership is not met. That will certainly hamper the implementation of the constitution. In the coming days, the actors aspiring to assume office would be forced to recognise that power will need to be shared among all the forces to achieve political stability, which has eluded Nepal for over a decade.

## **ASEAN**

Col Shyamji Yadav

Myanmar, Militias Ink Peace Pact with India as Witness. As a sign of its support to the ongoing peace process in Myanmar, India was among the countries which attended as international witnesses the signing of a National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) between Myanmar and two ethnic armed groups in Naypyitaw on Tuesday. . two more parties, the NMSP (New Mon State Party) and the LDU (Lahu Democratic Union), comprehensive peace and national reconciliation in Myanmar will also be conducive for the peace and prosperity of India's northeastern states.

“Given the positive bilateral relationship between India and Myanmar and the significance for India of the Myanmar peace process, Myanmar had earlier invited India (together with China, Japan, Thailand, the UN and the EU) to sign the NCA as international witnesses in October 2015,” NSA AjitDoval had represented India on that occasion. India's deputy NSA Rajinder Khanna attended the ceremony.

“At least 10 rebel groups have not joined the NCA, an accord negotiated by the previous quasi-civilian administration. Suu Kyi has opened a new round of talks with some of the groups since last May

Indian, Vietnamese Armies Hold First Military Exercise. For the first time, armies of India and Vietnam today began a six day-long military exercise in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, reflecting growing defence ties between the two countries.

It is the first military exercise between the two countries, a senior army official said here. The exercise, christened 'VINBAX' will continue for six days.

India and Vietnam have been exploring ways to strengthen defence cooperation.

Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc was here last week to participate in the India-ASEAN Commemorative summit and attend the Republic Day celebrations.

The issue of bolstering defence and security cooperation figured prominently during the bilateral talks Prime Minister Narendra Modi had with his Vietnamese counterpart.

Defence ties between India and Vietnam have been on an upswing with the primary focus being cooperation in the maritime domain.

India and Vietnam had signed a protocol on defence cooperation in 1994. The partnership was thereafter elevated to strategic level in 2007 and a pact on boosting bilateral defence cooperation was signed in 2009.

The strategic partnership was elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership in September 2016.

## **RUSSIA**

Col Harpreet Singh

**Russia Tests New Missile Defence System.** A video released by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, shows the successful test of a new rocket designed to destroy any missiles aimed at key Moscow installations. According to the Russian military, the tests of interceptor missiles for the A-135 anti-ballistic missile system were conducted at the Sary-Shagan site in the remote region of Kazakhstan.

Russia's military said the system is "intended to defend the city of Moscow from aerospace threat as well as to function in the interests of missile alert and space control". The upgraded air defence missiles are capable of intercepting single and multiple strikes, including new generation intercontinental ballistic missiles. Its tactical and technical characteristics with regards to range, precision, time frame of use, all significantly surpass firearms that exist in use today.

The new missiles will be added to the anti-ballistic missile system that has been in existence for 13 years and is run by Russian Aerospace Forces. The system is designed to intercept a strike against Moscow by hitting an incoming missile and can also potentially detonate a nuclear blast in the sky.

**Comments.** The system is being hailed in Russia as a game-changer for Russian defence. These types of systems being introduced by China and Russia are eroding the traditional advantages the US and its allies have held since the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and it's going to become more challenging for Western countries to gain and maintain control of the air, even for short periods, in a future major power interstate war. Even though both countries criticise the US for developing ballistic missile defence by claiming it is a destabilising move, they are moving quickly to develop a similar capability. These systems will be designed to counter a US or NATO retaliatory response. A nuclear 'first strike' against Russia may not be plausible, if they are able to deploy sufficient systems.

On the other hand Russia has also deployed additional nuclear-capable missiles in its Baltic Sea exclave of Kaliningrad on a permanent basis which may be a threat to Europe. These missiles can be used coercively, to threaten NATO with nuclear attack in a crisis as part of the Russian 'pre-emptive de-escalation' doctrine which 'escalates to de-escalate' — in effect threaten or carry out limited nuclear strikes to get NATO to back down after the Russians have intervened, say in the Baltics, for example. If the Russians are building up nukes in Kaliningrad then that suggested

the country's military is planning for an eventual confrontation with NATO. Their excuse of NATO 'massing forces' is not credible, because the NATO forces deployed into the Baltics to deter any Russian threat are limited.

**200 Russians Killed in Syria by US.** Several private Russian military contractors were killed by a US strike in Syria, as per Russian media reports. The Russian private contractors were supposedly a part of pro-government forces that advanced on oil fields in the Deir el-Zour province and were targeted by the US. The Russian defence ministry said 25 Syrian volunteers were wounded in the US strike and insisted that its troops weren't involved in Wednesday's incident. It said pro-government forces that advanced toward the area under control of the US-supported forces had failed to coordinate their action with the Russian military in Syria.

However, a different version is being given by US who said that the Russians killed were mercenaries and the US strikes, which reportedly killed about 100 of the attackers, were in self-defence. The U.S. military claimed the strikes were a response to an "unprovoked attack" on the Pentagon-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, a mostly Kurdish coalition of Arabs and ethnic minorities, by pro-Syrian government forces. US defence secretary Jim Mattis dismissed any suggestion that Russia had any control over the attacking force, whose nationalities, motives and makeup he could not identify. The US strike came as US-backed Kurdish-led forces were vying for control of the oil-rich Deir el-Zour province with Russian-backed Syrian troops that are reinforced by Iranian-supported militias"

Russia's Ministry of Defence distanced itself from those killed, stating there were no Russian soldiers in the area and the 'local militia' acted without coordination with the Russian command. Without mentioning the US strike, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov noted Tuesday that "Americans have taken dangerous unilateral steps."

**Comments.** There appears to be more credibility of the US version vis-a-vis the Russian one. Maxim Buga, a Cossack community leader in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad said that local Vladimir Loginov was among "dozens" of Russian fighters killed by U.S.-led coalition forces, which clashed with pro-Syrian government forces on February 7 near the eastern Syrian town of Khusham, DeirEzzor province. The far-left party, the Other Russia, said that one of its members, Kirill Ananiev, had also been killed in the incident, which the U.S.-led coalition and pro-Syrian government forces have accused one another of provoking, as a new front threatened to open in the war-torn country.

Conflict Intelligence Team identified additional Russian casualties, including Alexey Ladygin from the city of Ryazan and Stanislav Matveev and Igor Kosoturov from the town of Asbest. The group said both Metveev and Kosoturov may have fought alongside pro-Russia separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine prior to joining the fight against the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) and other insurgents challenging Assad's rule in Syria. The group also said that Loginov appeared to have joined the Wagner Group, a private paramilitary company, before traveling to fight in Syria. Last October, ISIS released a video showing two Russian-speaking men the militants claimed to have captured, and subsequent research showed the two men were likely Wagner Group members fighting in Syria.

This development that could further inflame Russia-US tensions. Both the Syrian military, backed by Russian air cover and allied militias, and the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces have all but defeated ISIS in Syria, but unprecedented tensions on the eastern front have threatened to work in the jihadis' favour. A joint Turkish and Syrian rebel offensive launched last month in the northwest and Israeli air raids on Syrian military defences near Damascus have also complicated efforts to defeat ISIS.

The Russian president has for the past few weeks maintained regular contacts with his Turkish and Iranian counterparts to meet at a common ground and to provide significant support for further peacemaking activity within the framework of U.N. efforts in Syria. However, Russia—along with Syria and Iran—has accused Washington of shielding ISIS and other jihadi groups in order to prolong its military presence, something the U.S. has denied.

## **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

**US Defence Budget 2018.** The U.S. military budget for fiscal year 2018 is \$824.6 billion (3.1% of GDP) is the largest In comparison to top nine military spenders including China and Russia. The impetus for this is the general public perception and of US DoD that US is losing its leadership to the growing might of China which has become assertive particularly in the Indo- pacific region and its collaboration with Russia which too is becoming militarily aggressive. Both are seen as threats by various strategic studies in US. It is for this reason the President Trumps call of making “America great” found resonance with the people.

Russia and China too are spending hugely towards defense. Russia now spends 4.1% of its GDP on its military, exceeding that of the U.S. for the first time in over a decade. The dramatic increase is likely due in part to Russia’s stated plans to invest more than \$700 billion to modernize its weapons system by 2020. In China too, military spending has increased in each of the past five years roughly in line with its economic growth. Last year, China’s Military expenditure of \$171.4 billion was 2 % of the GDP. Chinese maintain opacity in defense spending hence, the actual expenditure could be even more. Seen in comparison, with higher spending by US is still not of much comfort as their deployments are spread across the world in comparison to China and Russia. It is expected that as China increase its global foot print its defense expenditure too will also grow.

In this budget, the US focus areas admittedly are in strategic areas of space and Cyber as well as towards modernization of the conventional and strategic force level which involves both replacements and life extension of the existing weapon systems. The current budget has reversed the winding down of the military which was the key area during the Obama’s presidency. In fact, the budget calls for an increase of 25,900 military personnel by the end of fiscal year 2019.

## **SPACE**

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

On 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 18, Space X a Private company in United States showed off its might in the space launches by in two areas firstly, by launching most powerful rocket

Falcon X which was capable of carrying of nearly 64 ton weight, more than US delta rocket which is considered to world most powerful rocket. Second, the rocket's three first-stage boosters were expected to return to Earth and land and could be used for future launches thereby effecting huge savings. The Falcon's heavy's two side boosters landed successfully on the twin pads simultaneously at the nearby Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. The core booster, which was expected to land offshore on Space X's drone ship however, crashed as two of three engines did not fire during a final landing.

Space X has also built another ship with giant metal arms to catch the protective covering of the payload to cut the cost to the company of nearly \$5 million.

Space X is the example of efficiency, innovation and cost cutting in operation which can which can come about by allowing the private sector venture in this important area and holds out lessons for India too. Of late, Indian private sector too is venturing in the building of small satellites. On reusable technology, ISRO too has shown interest and engaged in developing Reusable launch vehicles however, we are still at the experimental stage.