

# ENVIRONMENT SCAN – 12 OCT 2015

**CHINA Col C Madhwal, VSM**

China Completes Construction of Lighthouses in Disputed South China Sea: China has completed the construction of two lighthouses in the Spratly islands in the disputed South China Sea, the official Xinhua news agency reported, as tensions in the region mount over Beijing's maritime ambitions. The United States and the Philippines have opposed the construction.

China claims most of the energy-rich South China Sea, through which \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes every year, and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei have overlapping claims.

China said on Friday it would not stand for violations of its territorial waters in the name of freedom of navigation, as the United States considers sailing warships to waters inside the 12-nautical-mile zones around islands it has built in the Spratly chain.

Washington has signaled it does not recognize Beijing's sovereignty over the several islands China has built on reefs in the Spratly archipelago and says the U.S. navy will continue to operate wherever international law allows.

Beijing has said construction in the region is to help maritime search and rescue, disaster relief, environmental protection and navigational security. It has also said it will continue to build other installations to better serve countries in the region and vessels navigating those waters.

A U.S. defense official said that the United States was considering sending ships to waters inside the 12-nautical-mile zones that China claims as territory around islands it has built in the Spratly chain. Western media reports quoted U.S. officials as saying the action could take place within a matter of days, but awaited a decision by U.S. President Barack Obama.

The commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, Admiral Harry Harris, declined to say whether the United States would carry out the plan. But he made clear it was an option he had presented to President Obama and said the United States must carry out freedom of navigation patrols throughout the Asia-Pacific.

China says U.S. Human Rights Report Biased: The U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China said on Thursday that it saw in China "a disturbing deterioration in human rights and rule of law conditions that pose a direct challenge to U.S. national interests and U.S.-China relations". The report comes weeks after Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Washington, during which U.S. President Barack Obama laid out concern over human rights.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a regular briefing that U.S. officials and the American public must be more objective. "This report has nothing new, embraces a persistent bias in order to make irresponsible remarks about China's domestic affairs, and makes criticisms that don't accord with the facts," Hua said.

"China's 1.3 billion people have the greatest authority to pass judgment," she said.

The U.S. commission said China was moving further away from a rule of law system and had increased pressure on civil society. It also criticized the state of religious freedom and Beijing's treatment of ethnic minorities.

Activists say that under Xi, China is conducting its most intense crackdown on human rights in two decades.

Nearly 1,000 rights activists were detained last year – almost as many as in the previous two years combined, according to Chinese Human Rights Defenders, a coalition of Chinese and international activist groups.

China has long argued that it is unfairly singled out for criticism of its rights record and says other governments should examine their own records before making accusations

Lagarde: China's Economy is not all 'Doom and Gloom': The head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, has said the outlook for China's economy is not all "doom and gloom". "I would say that it's a recovery that is decelerating a bit," she said, but said it was expected to gain momentum next year.

After double-digit growth for decades, China's economy slowed to 7.4% last year. The government has said it expected growth to slow further to about 7% this year. However, the IMF has forecast growth of just 6.8%.

"You don't move just overnight from being heavily controlled to being market determined, with massive market expectations that suddenly the situation should be the same across the world," Ms Lagarde said. "It just doesn't happen that way."

## UNITED STATES

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

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Recently, a media report has revealed that US is negotiating a nuclear deal with Pakistan. These talks could be at the top of US President Barack Obama's agenda with Pakistan when he receives Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at the White House later this month.

As for Pakistan, it always demanded nuclear deal similar to Indo-US nuclear deal. Besides gaining the psychological parity with India which has signed similar deal with US, Pakistan is also facing a huge energy crunch. Nuclear power generation can help but it is extremely short of Uranium. Chinese help and the local supply just do not meet the current uranium requirements. At the same time, Pakistan is stepping up production of enriched uranium and plutonium for weapons. It has one of the fastest nuclear weapon programme and has opted for full spectrum deterrence with strategic and tactical weapons.

The news of the nuclear deal has generated a predictable reaction from India as reported in the media. In general, most have questioned the wisdom of US considering this deal similar in line of Indo US Nuclear deal particularly in light of poor past record of nuclear proliferation of Pakistan particularly with Libya, Iran and North Korea. Further the fear of terror elements in Pakistan surreptitiously gaining access to the nuclear weapons and or materials has not been ruled out in view of an increase and regularity of terror attack on the security establishments in Pakistan. In past, even some of their retired scientists have known to have hobnobbed with Al Qaeda leader Bin Laden. Thus, the safety of Pakistan's nuclear material is questionable in the current security environment. This could impact even India's security situation.

US has negated this development but, in spite of denial there is a possibility of US mulling a nuclear deal with Pakistan. As a result of this deal, US could lift international restrictions against civilian nuclear commerce with Pakistan in return for significant voluntary restraints on its nuclear weapons programme.

What could have Lead US to Consider Nuclear Deal?

First, US motive could be to secure Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. To achieve this, US could develop a stake by trying to gain insight into Pakistan nuclear arsenal and possibly its whereabouts. As well as in view of its past poor nuclear proliferation record, take firm commitments from Pakistan's about stopping any further nuclear proliferation. For this, there is a considerable support from sections of the American non-proliferation community. Secondly, check Pakistan from further enhancing the nuclear arsenal further and even persuading it to agree to CTBT even though India has not signed it. Thirdly, try to wean away Pakistan from Chinese influence. The deal would require US/IAEA to actively track uranium fuel cycle so that Uranium or by product of fuel cycle is not diverted for weapon use. This may be difficult as the civil and military reactors are not segregated like in India and would pose problems in arriving the nuclear deal. At the same time, Pakistan may not want US oversight in its nuclear weapon programme.

It is not possible to defang nuclear Pakistan now. At best effort should be made to restrain nuclear use threat. The nuclear deal could do just that. It will not enhance Pakistan's nuclear weapon capacity; in fact it may become an instrument to regulate their nuclear programme with enough safety which built in it. With some sanity in nuclear programme, South Asia may not remain nuclear flash point as it seen now.

## RUSSIA

Col Anadi Dhaundiyal

Putin Speech in UNGA. Whatever actions any state might take bypassing UN procedure are illegitimate. They run counter to the charter and defy international law. We consider the attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the United Nations as extremely dangerous. We would get a world increasingly characterized by dictate rather than equality. We are all different, and we should respect that. No one has to conform to a single development model that someone has once and for all recognized as the only right one. The export of so-called democratic revolutions ones however continues. It would suffice to look at the situation in the Middle East and North Africa. Instead of the triumph of democracy and progress, we got violence, poverty and social disaster. I cannot help asking those who have caused the situation; do you realize now what you've done?

Tens of thousands of militants are fighting under the banners of the so-called IS. Its ranks include former Iraqi servicemen who were thrown out into the street after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Many recruits also come from Libya, a country whose statehood was destroyed as a result of a gross violation of the UNSC Resolution 1973. And now, the ranks of radicals are being joined by

the members of the so-called moderate Syrian opposition supported by the Western countries. First, they are armed and trained and then they defect to the so-called Islamic State. Besides, the IS itself did not just come from nowhere. It was also initially forged as a tool against undesirable secular regimes. It is hypocritical and irresponsible to make loud declarations about the threat of international terrorism while turning a blind eye to the channels of financing and supporting terrorists, including the process of trafficking and illicit trade in oil and arms. It would be equally irresponsible to try to manipulate extremist groups and place them at one's service in order to achieve one's own political goals in the hope of later dealing with them or, in other words, liquidating them. We believe that any attempts to play games with terrorists, let alone to arm them, are not just short-sighted, but fire hazardous.

Unfortunately, dear colleagues, I have to put it frankly: Russia is not an exception. We cannot allow these criminals who already tasted blood to return back home and continue their evil doings. No one wants this to happen, does he?

We think it is an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian government and its armed forces, who are valiantly fighting terrorism face to face. We should finally acknowledge that no one but President Assad's armed forces and Kurds militias are truly fighting the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria.

Dear colleagues, I must note that such an honest and frank approach of Russia has been recently used as a pretext to accuse it of its growing ambitions, as if those who say it have no ambitions at all.

Russia will shortly convene, as the (ph) current president of the Security Council, a ministerial meeting to carry out a comprehensive analysis of threats in the Middle East. First of all, we propose discussing whether it is possible to agree on a resolution aimed at coordinating the actions of all the forces that confront the IS and other terrorist organizations. Once again, this coordination should be based on the principles of the U.N. Charter. Above all, I believe it is of the utmost importance to help restore government's institutions in Libya, support the new government of Iraq and provide comprehensive assistance to the legitimate government of Syria.

The bloc thinking of the times of the Cold War and the desire to explore new geopolitical areas is still present among some of our colleagues. First, they continue their policy of expanding NATO. What for? If the Warsaw Bloc stopped its existence, the Soviet Union have collapsed and, nevertheless, the NATO continues expanding as well as its military infrastructure. Then they

offered the poor Soviet countries a false choice: either to be with the West or with the East. Sooner or later, this logic of confrontation was bound to spark off a grave geopolitical crisis. This is exactly what happened in Ukraine, where the discontent of population with the current authorities was used and the military coup was orchestrated from outside — that triggered a civil war as a result. We're confident that only through full and faithful implementation of the Minsk agreements of February 12th, 2015, can we put an end to the bloodshed and find a way out of the deadlock. What is needed is a genuine consideration for the interests and rights of the people in the Donbas region and respect for their choice which needs to be coordinated as provided for by the Minsk agreements.

Comments. Frank speaking by Mr Putin.

Syria Powerplay. Putin will stop at nothing in pursuit of his goals in Syria:-

(a) Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in a joint television appearance, stated that Russian warships in the Caspian Sea launched rockets on 07 Oct 15 at the IS. The missiles flew nearly 1,500km over Iran and Iraq and struck Raqqa and Aleppo provinces in the north and Idlib province in the northwest. Putin further said that Russian efforts "will be synchronised with the actions of the Syrian army on the ground and the actions of our air force will effectively support the offensive operation of the Syrian army". Putin ordered Shoigu to continue cooperation with the US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq on Syria. Russian Def Min said that Russian forces have struck 112 targets in war-torn Syria since September 30. In Aleppo, Russian strikes targeted the towns of al-Bab and Deir Hafer, about 20km east of a military airport currently besieged by ISIL fighters.

(b) Russian warplanes supported the Syrian army and pro-regime forces during launch of a major ground operation in Hama province. Russian President Vladimir Putin said on 11 Oct that he ruled out possibility of the Russian Armed Forces' participation in ground operations in Syria.

Comments. The likely positive aspects of Mr Putin's mov are:-

(a) First Mover Advantage. While USA was hesitant and sought to mov with allies, Russia displayed bold military resolve. Mr. Obama has made clear he is not willing to confront the Russians and risk an escalation, nor does he have a broad new strategy to resolve the conflict or defeat the Islamic State.

(b) To prop up his ally Assad. Syria is home to Russia's only naval base in the Middle East and has long been a buyer of Russian arms and a supplier of regional intelligence.

(c) Emerge as a player in international relations and force his way back in from the cold on the global stage. He has displayed a clear and simple strategy as he waded into such a complicated international situation. Whether they like it or not, western leaders now have to talk to him again for any issue on Syria. He can risk Russian lives in Syria due to US/ Western fire without losing political capital at home. It will rather whip up Russian nationalistic feelings further. US position on Syria, in that case would become more discomforting.

(d) He is also deflecting attention from Ukraine.

(e) Mr Putin's dependability amongst the Shia regimes of Iran and Iraq will increase further. Control on oil could be a resultant. Though unlikely, these countries may help movement of oil prices to the north. Russian President Vladimir Putin's bullish entry into the Syrian conflict has worked wonders for his popularity in neighbouring Iraq, where some await "Hajji Putin" like a saviour. Iraqis see Moscow -- which has staunchly backed Damascus and Tehran in recent years -- as a more natural ally than the United States, which occupied the country for eight years. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who is supported by the West, has been more equivocal but has not ruled out enlisting Russia's help. Hakim al-Zamili, the head of Iraqi parliament's defence committee has suggested Baghdad to request Russian air strikes.

(f) US backed forces get discredited in the eyes of the Free Syrian Army/ groups by demonstrating that the United States cannot protect them.

(g) Russian President Vladimir Putin said on 11 Oct 15 "We have never ever been notified of similar missions, but we have chosen to do so. Of courtesy and reason, of the intention to demonstrate we are open for joint efforts."

(h) US led forces can't allow a raid against Assad and his planes since there is the slightest risk of hitting the Russians also. Prior to Russian arrival there was talk of imposing a no-fly zone against Assad and pounding his forces. Now that's finished, it's dead."

AFGHANISTAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

U.S., NATO Signal Willingness to Slow Afghan Drawdown. The United States and its NATO allies are considering slowing their withdrawal from Afghanistan, days after the Taliban's brief takeover of a provincial capital stoked concern about the strength of Afghan state forces.

U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter asked allies for flexibility while the US reviews its withdrawal timetable currently supposed to slash the nearly 10,000 U.S. troops to a small U.S.-embassy based force after 2016. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said: "I sense that many allies are willing to stay longer if needed."

Although Afghan forces have recaptured the strategic northern city of Kunduz, its brief fall to the Taliban last month underscored concerns about the capabilities of Afghanistan's security forces.

U.S. President Barack Obama had aimed to withdraw all but a small U.S. force before leaving office, pinning his hopes on training and equipping local forces to contain Taliban militants fighting to return to power. The US has spent around \$65 billion on preparing the fledgling Afghan security forces of about 350,000 personnel.

Rand Paul: Why is US Still in Afghanistan. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, a GOP presidential candidate said the U.S. military strike that hit a hospital in Afghanistan raises questions over the U.S.'s continued involvement in that country, 14 years after the U.S. first deployed troops there. Paul argued the U.S. should no longer be fighting the war in Afghanistan and that "the Afghans need to step it up and defend themselves."

Sen. Paul said that while the U.S. "had a clear cut mission" in Afghanistan following the attacks of September 11, 2001, "that's been long gone for many years now." Paul, whose non-interventionist foreign policy views are largely out of step with his party's hawkish majority, said the U.S. should avoid a "perpetual war" in Afghanistan and said Afghans "should be able to defend themselves" as the U.S. has poured billions of dollars in aid into Afghanistan.

Donald Trump: Afghanistan War a 'Mistake,' but Troops Need to Stay. GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump said that he believes that invading Afghanistan in 2001 was a "terrible mistake," but he added U.S. troops need to stay in order to avoid a collapse of the government.

"We made a terrible mistake getting involved there in the first place," Trump said. "It's a mess, it's a mess and at this point we probably have to (leave U.S. troops in Afghanistan) because that thing will collapse in about two seconds after they leave." Trump has long called the Iraq War a

mistake, but this is the first time that Trump has described the U.S. war in Afghanistan in the same terms.

While virtually all 2016 presidential contenders now say they believe the Iraq War was a mistake, none has lamented the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan following al-Qaeda's terror attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

Afghan Forces Requested Strike on Hospital in Kunduz. Afghan forces under Taliban attack requested U.S. air strikes near a hospital in the northern city of Kunduz, the commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan said, correcting earlier military reports that American forces were under fire in the area and called in the strikes for themselves. Saturday's incident at the 'Doctors Without Borders' hospital, killed 22 people and injured numerous others.

President Barack Obama expressed condolences for the strike over the weekend. "There is no country in the world and no military in the world that goes to greater lengths and places a higher premium on avoiding civilians casualties, than the United States," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said.

Afghanistan the Next Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member. Afghanistan has formally asked to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), was founded by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in 2001.

For SCO member states—especially China and Russia—the security situation in Afghanistan is of importance to overall regional security. Though the SCO has a mostly muted political and economic agenda, it serves as a regional coordination forum for counter-terrorism. The SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) oversees member state cooperation against what the organization describes as the "three evils": separatism, extremism, and terrorism.

Afghanistan received observer status at the SCO in 2012 and, was the sole SCO observer state that hadn't taken any steps toward accession. Afghanistan, as a member of the SCO, could serve as an important fulcrum for the organization's regional security agenda and could make the SCO more relevant in Asia. More so if the United States and NATO end up going by their current plan of withdrawal from Afghanistan despite an uncertain security situation Afghanistan could lean on the SCO for assistance.

MIDDLE EAST

Brig Ranjit Singh

IRAQ

Kurdistan Announces Use of Mustard Gas by ISIS in Iraq. Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs announced that ISIS has used mustard gas in shelling against Peshmerga forces in northern Iraq.

28 ISIS Militants Killed in Coalition Strikes in Mosul. Security sources reported that 28 ISIS militants were killed in coalition air strikes in different parts of Mosul. ISIS hq & vehicles were also destroyed in attacks.

10 ISIS Elements Killed by Unknown Snipers in Mosul. Several killings have been reported in Mosul by unknown snipers in Mosul, probably by armed battalions.

Kurdistan Announced Death of 250 Kurdish Militants who Joined ISIS. Kurdistan announced death of 250 of its elements who joined ISIS. Estimated 500 of them had joined ISIS & it is estimated that approx 100 of them are still fighting with ISIS.

ISIS Executes 27 of its Wounded Elements. It is reported that ISIS executed 27 of its wounded cadres due to lack of medical facilities in Mosul. Such actions carried out earlier as well.

20 ISIS Elements Killed by Food Poisoning in Mosul. It reported that 20 ISIS militants were killed by food poisoning with some toxic substance in the dist of Baaj west of Mosul.

ISIS Prevent Gathering more than Three in Mosul. ISIS is preventing all types of gathering more than 3 in Mosul, possibly anticipating mass uprising against it in Mosul.

ISIS Executes 2 Young Men by Throwing them from Roof Top of High Rise Building. Two men were executed by ISIS suspected of homosexuality by throwing them from roof top in public presence. This is also to create fear psychosis in public.

ISIS Leaders Move their Families from to Syria. ISIS leaders have moved 75 families from Mosul to Syria, possibly due to rising sentiment of people against ISIS.

5 ISIS elements surrender to Peshmerga forces S of Erbil.

ISIS Beheads 7 Elements of Peshmerga Forces Taken as Prisoners in Kirkuk. This comes are Peshmerga forces have controlled large areas in Kirkuk.

Coalition Strikes Kill, Wound 27 ISIS Elements in Kirkuk. International coalition air strikes targeted 3 tactical units & sites used for firing rockets, killing, wounding 27 ISIS elements SW of Kirkuk.

ISIS Abducts 200 People from Kirkuk. ISIS kidnapped 200 people from Kirkuk on charge of supporting security forces.

Iraq Army Kills 19 Elements in Ramadi. Iraq Army killed 19 & wounded 35 ISIS elements by Arty strikes in Ramadi, destroyed 4 of its HQ in different locations.

Iraqi Forces Retake Areas Around Ramadi. Iraqi forces retook several areas N & W of Ramadi from ISIS, as operations intensify to retake Ramadi.

Iraqi Forces Claim to have Struck Baghdadi Convoy. Iraqi forces claim to have carried out air strikes on Baghdadi convoy while moving towards Karabala near th border with Syria. Several ISIS elements are believed to be killed, health status of Baghdadi is not known.

Allavi Announces Disappearance of 76 Armoured Vehicles. Allavi, Chairman of National Coalition announced disappearance of 76 armoured vehicles sent by Gulf states on his request. The vehicles were air lifted but are not traceable now.

Putin's popularity has sky rocketed in Iraq post Russian strikes in Syria. There is a growing demand for Russian support in fight against ISIS in Iraq.

Comments.

ISIS seems to be losing grip over its capital & strong hold of Mosul in N Iraq. Public resentment against ISIS is rising & mass uprising is feared. Shifting of families of ISIS leaders is indicative of the public mood against ISIS.

ISIS killing its wounded as well rising casualties of its cadre is likely to lower its morale.

ISIS has been using mustard gas against Peshmerga forces.

Iraqi forces are closing in on Ramadi. The recent success in retaking several areas in N & W would assist in launch of offensive to retake Ramadi.

Popularity of Putin has sky rocketed in Iraq and there is growing demand for Russian support to fight ISIS. Participation of Russia in Iraq would greatly assist in fight against ISIS in Iraq.

## SYRIA

Syrian Forces make Gains under Russian Air Cover. Syrian forces captured Asthan village from rebels in Hama Province after heavy fighting. The Govt forces are pushing NW to capture neighbouring areas. Russian air strikes appear to be targeting town of Khan Sheikhun.

ISIS Advance Towards Aleppo Despite Russian Air Strikes. ISIS captured a string of villages near Aleppo from rebels in a lightning attack, bringing ISIS few miles of Aleppo. This is most significant gain of ISIS in months. They also captured military base having Infantry Academy NE of Aleppo. ISIS took advantage of rebel fighting Govt forces supported by Russian air strikes.

Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps Gen Killed Near Aleppo. Iranian Revolutionary Guards Brig Gen advisor to Govt forces was killed by ISIS near Aleppo. Large number of Iranian Special Forces officers is advising Govt forces in fight against ISIS.

US Scraps Syria Rebel Training Programme. US has scrapped 5 bn dollar programme to train moderate Syria rebels due to its failure. US had proposed to train 15000 rebels in three years but could train only 60, their reliability was suspect. US now propose to provide arms & equipment to established rebel groups fighting ISIS.

Hundreds of Iranians have arrived in Syria to take part in ground operations. Iran has mobilized Shia militia as well as Lebanese Hezbollah to fight in support of Asaad forces. Revolutionary Guards have been guiding operations of Govt forces.

China is reported to sent aircraft carrier to Mediterranean to support Russia in Syria.

Comments.

Post air strikes by Russia, Syrian Govt forces have intensified operations against rebel strongholds in Hama Province, which are aimed at consolidating hold of Govt forces in the Province.

Russian air strikes are primarily aimed against rebel forces rather than ISIS. This is primarily being done to consolidate the position of Govt forces.

Iran is to play a vital role in Syria in the days ahead. It is expected to commit troops on ground in support of Assad forces. A large number of special forces officers are guiding the operations of Govt forces, though they have suffered substantial casualties.

Employment of cruise missiles by Russia is to reassert its position in the region & display its military might as well against West during its troubled times. Use of cruise missiles has raised an alarm in the NATO alliance & preliminary preparations are underway to activate their bases in Europe.

China's involvement in Syria in support of Russia would add another dimension to the conflict & challenge US led strategy in fight against ISIS. This would also bring the two opposing groups in direct confrontation. This would afford legitimacy to actions by Russia so far being criticized by US & its allies.

## YEMEN

Coalition forces retake the strategic town of Marib from Houthi rebels. The coalition forces have captured the strategic town of Marib from Houthi rebels, clearing the way for launching offensive to retake Sanaa. Houthis flee the last bastion in Marib as the coalition forces captured Al Zor area in the city of Sirwah. The strategic province is almost in full control of coalition forces. Houthis suffered heavy casualties killing 437, hundreds wounded, 27 tanks & 145 armoured vehicles destroyed.

15 Coalition troops martyred in Aden. Four car bombs targeted Govt offices in a hotel & coalition forces building, in which PM & several ministers narrowly escaped but coalition forces suffered 15 casualties in the attack.

Saudi led coalition capture strategic Bab al Mandeb Strait. Saudi led coalition captured strategic Bab al Mandeb Strait from Houthi rebels, thus closing Iran's supply route to rebels in Yemen.

Hadi forces regain control of new dist in Red Sea. The Govt forces have regained control of Dhubab dist on the Red Sea in Taiz Province, forcing Houthi rebels to the city of Taiz.

Gulf Arab troops wrest strategic Yemen Island. Gulf Arab troops swooped in from air & sea to take back Perim Island from Houthi rebels. The island is in the entrance to Red Sea, astride trade routes.

UN says Houthis have accepted to UN resolution that calls for end to violence, withdrawal of forces from all areas seized by them and a halt to undermining political transition.

Yemeni Govt has dismissed Houthi agreement to UN resolution as a manoeuvre & demanded that Houthi rebels should hand back the territory seized in last one year.

Comments.

With two major setbacks to Houthi rebels ie defeat in Marib & loss Bab al Mandeb Strait, the military defeat of Houthi rebels is imminent, thus they have accepted UN resolution. However, Hadi Govt will move with utmost caution since the agreements in past have been abrogated very quickly.

Loss of Bab al Mandeb Strait by Houthi rebels has cut off supply routes from Iran & horn of Africa.

The operations to retake city of Taiz & Sanaa are likely to progress at a much faster pace due ascendency gained by coalition forces,

AFRICA

Col Ajay Ramdev

Tunisian Group Wins Nobel Peace Prize

An alliance of Tunisian workers, employers, lawyers and activists won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday, 09 Oct 2105, a decision meant to honor the quest for democracy in the nation that gave birth to the Arab Spring, as well as urge it on at a time when its still-tenuous gains are increasingly under threat.

Background.

The award was aimed at supporting the nation where the Arab uprisings began after street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi immolated himself on 17 Dec 2010, to protest official repression and corruption. The fragility of the progress made in Tunisia was highlighted as recently as 08 Oct 15, following the attempted assassination of a leading secular politician.

The largest source of foreign fighters joining the Islamic State, Tunisia is also in the midst of a crackdown on extremists that critics fear could fail to quell mounting violence or overreach and undermine hard-won civil rights.

During critical junctures in 2013 and 2014, the civil society groups provided a vital bridge for dialogue and political compromises between the Islamists then in government and Tunisia's opposition and secular movements.

The opened channels helped ease the deep polarization and mistrust that have torn apart other nations in the aftermath of the Arab Spring upheavals.

The National Dialogue Quartet including the Tunisian General Labor Union (Houcine Abbassi, secretary general), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (Wided Bouchamaoui, president), the Tunisian Human Rights League (Abdessattar ben Moussa, president) and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers (Fadhel Mahfoudh, president) — has made a “decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011,”

The quartet of groups, including a labor union with about 1 million members, has worked to advance democracy in Tunisia, which still struggles with unrest but has made relative strides toward reforms even as other Arab Spring nations face greater violence, instability and the reemergence of dictatorships.

Comments. Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi hailed the award as a sign of hope at a time when Tunisians needed it most. Following the fall of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in 2011, Tunisia's democracy has emerged as the strongest in the Arab world, even as it confronts still-deep divisions and challenges.

After a dialogue between Islamist and secular lawmakers, Tunisia last year passed a constitution seen as one of the region's most liberal, winning praise from human rights groups.

Last year, Tunisia also held its first democratic presidential elections, voting in Caid Essebsi, who served under the repressive regime of former president Habib Bourguiba.

UN proposes “Unity Government” for Libya. The UN special envoy, Bernardino Leon, presented the proposed government in Morocco

The UN envoy for Libya has announced a national unity government for Libya after months of talks between the North African country's two rival governments. Leon said the prime minister for the new government is Fayeze Sarraj, a member of the Tripoli-based administration. The cabinet includes three deputies for the prime minister - representing the country's east, west and south - and two ministers to complete a presidential council.

Negotiators who attended the peace talks representing the rival governments approved the names of candidates, but the parliaments for both sides must approve them, too. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the proposal of a unity government in a statement issued by his media office, while urging the parties to accept and sign the agreement. The proposal has the backing of European Union who have welcomed the proposal.

Rival Administrations.

Libya has had rival administrations since August last year, when an alliance of militias from the city of Misrata known as Libya Dawn took over the capital, Tripoli. The group drove out the internationally-recognised government, which now operates in the eastern city of Tobruk.

Stumbling blocks in the process have been the disbanding of militias as well as the removal of former general Khalifa Haftar - the military commander for the Tobruk parliament, which is recognised by the UN and the Arab League.

Comments. MPs from Libya's rival parliaments have expressed doubts about a UN proposal for a national unity government, saying the announcement was premature. It came after nearly a year of talks between the Islamist-backed parliament in Tripoli and the internationally recognised administration in the east. Both parliaments, backed by rival militia groups, will have to vote on whether to accept the deal.

Also, the two main militant factions only reluctantly agreed to the deal. Further, the government will also have to deal with the threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group, which has gained a foothold in Gaddafi's former hometown, Sirte.

Central Asian Republics' (CARS) response to growing Taliban Dominance in Kunduz and adjoining regions in Afghanistan

Air Cmde T Chand (Retd)

The temporary capture of Kunduz, the capital of Kunduz Province, by the Taliban recently, has drawn different response from several parts of the world. Central Asian Republics especially Tajikistan has long feared the influx of terrorism in to its territory as it shares a 1200 km long border with the Afghanistan. Kunduz is in close proximity to Tajikistan borders (70 km). Temporary capture of the Kunduz is being seen as a real threat to stability and security in the region.

The Russian led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Belarus, as its members has long been preparing for the security of its members. Earlier this year, Russia announced the creation of a rapid reaction force of 70,000, which can be assembled within three days. In May this year, 2,500 CSTO troops participated in a Tajikistan exercise. Also, in September this year, nearly 100,000 troops participated in an exercise to demonstrate their ability to defend the region. Russia intends to increase the number of its troops in Tajikistan from the current 6,500 to some 9,000. Russian forces are also believed to be helping Tajik border guards along the Afghan frontier.

Uzbekistan appears to be on its own even though it shares a border of 60 km with Afghanistan. Afghanistan's third Central Asian neighbour, Turkmenistan, has also been silent about Kunduz, in spite of the escalating violence in three out of four Afghan provinces bordering it. In a recent article the former Army Chief of Pakistan Gen Mirza Aslam Beg, has opined that the Taliban have shown great deal of flexibility of maneuver, by shifting their Pivot of Resistance to the North of Afghanistan, because Pakistan military had dismantled their support base and sanctuaries in the FATA region and their new support base now is well-established in the provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Faryab, Zabul, Baghlan, Jozjan, Baghdiz and Kunduz. He suggests that with every passing day, their fighting strength is increasing, as the Movement for Independence of Uzbekistan (MIU), Mujahedeen from Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Xingjian and from within Afghanistan, the Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras continue to join them and their new support base is safe and secure, because none have the will to venture towards this base. Gen Beg's assessment may have been a little exaggerated but the fear of instability seems to be growing among the CARs especially after the Kunduz episode. A more coordinated approach by the CSTO members along with the Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan is likely to enable them to face the unpredictable situation better.