

# ENVIRONMENT SCAN –23 NOV 2015

**CHINA, UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, AFGHANISTAN, IRAN, PAKISTAN**

Chinese Forces Kill 28 people 'Responsible for Xinjiang Mine Attack': Chinese security forces have killed 28 people allegedly responsible for a deadly attack on a coal mine in Xinjiang, state media has said. The deaths took place over a 56-day operation in which one person was detained, Xinjiang government's web portal Tianshan reported.

It is the first official report of the 18 September incident at the Sogan colliery in Asku that killed 16 people. Xinjiang, often hit by unrest, is home to a Uighur ethnic minority. China says "foreign terrorists" are behind the violence in the region. Hundreds of people have died in attacks over the past three years.

Ethnic Uighurs, who are mostly Muslim, say Beijing's repression of their religious and cultural customs is provoking the violence.

"After 56 days of continuous fighting, Xinjiang destroyed a violent terrorist gang directly under the command of a foreign extremist group. Aside from one person who surrendered, 28 thugs were completely annihilated," the Xinjiang Daily said, according to Reuters news agency.

US government-funded Radio Free Asia (RFA) was the first to report the mine attack in September. It said at least 50 people were killed. Earlier this week, RFA said 17 suspects from three families, including women and children, had been killed in the police operation in response to the mine attack.

China strictly controls media access to Xinjiang so reports are difficult to verify.

China Declares War on ISIS after Terrorists Claim to have Executed Chinese Hostage: President Xi Jinping has promised to fight terrorist activity after deaths of national Fan Jinghui and European Ole Johan Grimsgaard-Ofstad. China will join the war on ISIS after four of its citizens were killed by Islamist terror groups in two separate attacks this week.

The vow comes after ISIS claimed to have killed Beijing man Fan Jinghui, 50, alongside Norwegian national Ole Johan Grimsgaard-Ofstad, 48, who were feared to have been taken hostage in September.

Chinese President Xi Jinping: "China will strengthen cooperation with the international community, resolutely crack down on violent terrorist operations that devastate innocent lives and safeguard world peace and security." He also called on the relevant departments to boost security work "outside China's borders".

Xi also today condemned the "cruel and savage" attack by militants on a hotel in Mali's capital that killed more than people yesterday, including three executives from a Chinese railway company.

"With no regard for human conscience and moral baseline, the terrorist organisation still carried out this cold-blooded and violent action," he said. "The Chinese government strongly condemns this inhuman action and will definitely hold the perpetrators accountable."

Beijing has repeatedly denounced Islamist militants and urged the world to step up coordination in combating Islamic State, though it has been reluctant to get involved on the ground in Syria and Iraq where the group largely operates.

China Says Won't Cease Building on South China Sea Isles:

China said it will continue to build military and civilian facilities on its artificial islands in the disputed South China Sea and the United States was testing it by sending warships through the area.

"Building and maintaining necessary military facilities, this is what is required for China's national defense and for the protection of those islands and reefs," Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin told a news conference in Kuala Lumpur.

China planned to "expand and upgrade" the civilian facilities on the islands "to better serve commercial ships, fishermen, to help distressed vessels and provide more public services", Liu said, adding that China rejects the notion that it is militarizing the South China Sea. He said China has mostly built civilian facilities.

Liu's comments at the annual East Asia Summit, this year hosted by Kuala Lumpur, were some of the most forceful explanations that China has given regarding its position on the South China Sea.

Washington was testing Beijing with its insistence on "freedom of navigation" patrols in the strategic waterway, Liu said.

China, which claims almost the entire energy-rich South China Sea, has been transforming reefs into artificial islands in the Spratly archipelago and building airfields and other facilities on some of them. That has prompted concerns in Washington and across the region that Beijing is trying to militarize its claims in the South China Sea.

Earlier this month, U.S. B-52 bombers flew near some of the islands, signaling Washington's determination to challenge Beijing's claim. At the end of October, the USS Lassen, a guided-missile destroyer, sailed around one of them.

"This time, in a very high profile manner, the U.S. sent military vessels within 12 nautical miles of China's islands and reefs," Liu said. "This has gone beyond the scope of freedom of navigation. It is a political provocation and the purpose is to test China's response."

Obama on Saturday called on countries to stop building artificial islands and militarizing their claims and said the United States would continue to assert its freedom of navigation rights in the sea.

Chinese PM calls for Direct Talks over Disputed South China Sea Islands: As tensions over the disputed islands in the South China Sea rise, Southeast Asian nations should resolve their differences and discuss the issue in direct talks, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said at the ASEAN summit in Malaysia.

"In recent years, the South China Sea disputes, which should have been addressed by directly concerned countries through negotiation and talks, have been played up to become a problem concerning the South China Sea's peace and stability and the freedom of navigation," Xinhua quoted Li as saying in Kuala Lumpur late Saturday, while addressing the 18th China-ASEAN (10+1) leaders' meeting.

Continuing confrontation "is in nobody's interest," the Chinese premier said, adding: "Only by expanding our common interests and seeking common ground can we narrow our differences."

The US believes China's actions pose a threat to freedom of navigation in the region and refuses to acknowledge Beijing's sovereignty over the islands.

Only a week ago, two American B-52 strategic bombers flew near Chinese artificial islands in the South China Sea, ignoring calls to leave the area from Beijing's aviation authorities. The Pentagon claimed the "routine mission" was in accordance with international treaties.

“Freedom of navigation and overflight have never been a problem,” Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin said during the ASEAN talks with Asia-Pacific leaders.

"The actions of the US warship have threatened China's sovereignty and security interests, jeopardized the safety of personnel and facilities on the reefs, and damaged regional peace and stability," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Later, Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan urged the US not to threaten Beijing's sovereignty or its security interests in the region.

The U.S. Navy Will Likely Carry out Another Patrol within 12 nautical miles of Artificial Islands in the South China Sea before the End of the Year: A U.S. defense official said this month the Navy planned two or more patrols a quarter in the region as part of its plan to regularly exercise its rights under international law and remind China and others about its view.

The U.S. Navy official said the next patrol in the Spratly Islands archipelago would likely take place in December.

Two U.S. B-52 bombers also flew near the artificial Chinese islands last week, in advance of President Barack Obama's visit to the region this week to attend Asia-Pacific summits.

In a report published on the Chinese defense ministry's website on Thursday, China's top admiral, Wu Shengli, said his forces have shown "enormous restraint" in the face of U.S. provocations in the South China Sea, while warning they stand ready to respond to repeated breaches of Chinese sovereignty.

Earlier this month, Senator John McCain, the Republican head of the Senate Armed Services Committee called on the Pentagon to clarify publicly the legal intent of last month's patrol.

U.S. officials said the Navy avoided military drills that could have exacerbated tensions with Beijing during the Lassen's Oct. 27 patrol in the Spratly Islands, an approach experts said could reinforce rather than challenge China's sovereignty claims.

UNITED STATES

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

United States Defence cooperation Security Cooperation Agency has notified a possible sale of three state of the art, Global hawk (RQ-4 Block30) remotely piloted vehicle to Japan along with associated equipment and logistic support for an estimated cost of \$1.2 billion.

Japan like other south Asian states is worried about china's aggressive stance and particularly concerned about Chinese claim on the Senkaku Island in South China Sea. There has been in past near warlike situations in the region. Global hawk RPV will enable Japan to keep surveillance on the Chinese movements which threaten the Island. This high altitude endurance Unmanned aerial vehicle was developed after a programme initiated by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). It can fly at maximum altitude of 60,000ft and remain on station for 32+hrs and 24 hrs when 1200nm off station. The system is capable to provide game changing situational awareness and targeting information both for fixed and moving targets hence, enhance Japans capability to react to any untoward incident.

The proposed sale therefore, will significantly enhance Japan's intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and help it to monitor and deter regional threats.

The sale of Global Hawk system may be perceived by China as U.S. meddling in the region. United States however, could claim that the proposed transaction is consonant with the U.S. Foreign policy and 1960 treaty of Mutual cooperation and security between United Sates and Japan

## RUSSIA

Col Anadi Dhaundiyal

Russia - Syria. Mr Putin is reportedly planning to mount an enormous military mission to take control of the terror group's stronghold of Raqqa. Mr Putin is reportedly set to mobilise 150,000 reservists who he conscripted into the military in September. Western reports say that Russia wants to sweep up the west of the country, taking Raqqa and all the oil and gas resources around Palmyra. This is fast becoming a race to Raqqa – to secure the oil fields they need to cleanse the region of insurgents, and the IS capital is vital to do that.

Comments. The likely aspects of a probable move by Mr Putin are:-

(a) Military Strength. Moscow does have the military strength to run over opposition to Raqqa. So did the US in Iraq. The problem however has two dimensions.

(b) Melting Away by Opposition. Just as the Iraqi Republican Guard, loyal to Saddam Husain did not offer resistance to US Forces but made their consolidation and holding costly to the occupational forces, the IS could make the intervention costly and prolonged.

(c) Target of terrorism. Just as US remained the focus of all jihadi attacks in the past, the jihadist's attention could shift to Russia in the future. Russia is more vulnerable than US on many counts. US is not showing keenness to lead in anti terror/ IS operations on this count. It has, so far sought its European partners as well as arab nations to take lead.

(d) Holding Forces. More important than invading forces are the holding forces. Russia is also seeking the global community to jointly fight the IS.

Collaboration Against IS. French President Mr Hollande will meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Nov. 26 to discuss fighting against terrorism and Syrian crisis. Earlier, on 24 Nov, he visits the White House where he plans to put forth a broad coalition that message when but he is facing deep skepticism in Washington.

(a) The meeting between presidents Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin on the margins of the G20 meeting in Turkey on 15 Nov are reported to be inconclusive.

(b) Russia and France are seeking international collaboration against IS.

(c) Russia has friendly ground forces of over 3000 servicemen of Iranian Army's Revolutionary Guard Command (IRGC) operating in the Syrian offensive in the Hama-Homs axis in addition to at least 1500-strong grouping of Hezbollah.

(d) Russia has established contact, as per Mr Putin, with the western backed Syrian rebels in order to put together opposition against IS.

(e) US understands that to be effective in Syria, they need a local ally who has boots on ground.

(f) The Iraqi army has never recovered from last year's defeats and is less attractive for recruits than the three big Shia militias: Badr Organisation, Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kataib Hezbollah.

(g) The Russian leader will host Jordanian King Abdullah II on 24 Nov and French leader Francois Hollande on 26 Nov in Russia. Earlier the former French president Nicolas

Sarkozy after a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on October 29, 2015 declared that "World needs Russia".

Comments. While the US led coalition in Syria was taking the CIA line, the recent leadership of Russia, Paris attacks has made the EU impatient and seems to desire to delink Assad with ISIS problem.

U.S. Eyes Russia-Iran Split in Bid to End Syria Conflict. Washington's Middle East allies aim to coax Putin to support limits on Tehran-backed Assad's time in power. The Obama administration and European and Arab allies are seeking to peel Russia away from its alliance with Iran, a partnership that has bolstered Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, said senior diplomats involved in efforts to end Syria's lengthy conflict.

Such a step would solidify an emerging international coalition and help clear the way for a more concerted military effort to counter Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Iran is seen as a brake on those efforts because of its more staunchly pro-Assad position, which it wants the Kremlin to support.

U.S. and European officials also said they believe Iran's elite military unit, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has withdrawn some troops from Syria in recent weeks, because of a strain on its resources.

Mr. Putin has held discussions in recent weeks with leaders from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel, and has indicated Moscow would seek to limit Iran's influence inside Syria as part of any negotiated settlement to the conflict, the senior diplomats said.

Comments. Russia will not end its support to Syria as Iran's interest is intertwined in it. It gains stature and say in international affairs. West would like to delay any support to Russia in hope of it abandoning Assad in a future time frame. Russia would be keen to keep the troops on grounds, including the Free Syrian Army aligned to its side and gain the leverage.

Putin Plans First Visit to Iran Since 2007. Putin on 13 Nov held a telephone conversation with Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and discussed Tehran-Moscow relations.

(a) Russian president Vladimir Putin is visiting Iran on Nov. 23 to take part in Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), a summit of gas exporters and is expected to hold talks with Iran's leadership his first visit to the nation since 2007.

(b) Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov said. "It's logical that during the course of participation in the summit, naturally, there will be bilateral contacts and meetings with the hosts, and with the other countries that are participating on the same level," Mr. Ushakov said, according to Russian news agencies. The Kremlin aide said the schedule of meetings so far hadn't been finalized. Presidents of Bolivia and Venezuela have requested meetings with Putin during the Iran visit.

(c) Iran, Russia, Qatar, Algeria, Bolivia, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Nigeria, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Peru, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman are main members of GECF. GECF members account for 42 percent of global gas output, 70 percent of global gas reserves, 40 percent of pipe gas transmission, and 65 percent of global trade of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).

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

(a) First mover advantage. Moscow is also keen to use its long-standing relations with Tehran to win lucrative contracts in the energy sector, including building Nuclear power plants.

(b) Syria Strategy may be discussed.

Putin's Anti Terror Stand. Putin says seeks global anti-terrorism fight after 19 killed in Mali attack. The 19 people dead in the attack on at Hotel Radisson Blu in Mali, included six Russians. Mali declared increased security at strategic points around Bamako at the start of a declared 10-day state of emergency.

## AFGHANISTAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

Indo-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement. Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Hekamat Karzai during his visit to India sought operationalization of the four-year-old India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), in which defence cooperation is a major component.

The SPA, signed between Afghanistan and India during Afghan President Hamid Karzai's visit to India in October 2011, formalized a framework for cooperation in various areas including

apolitical and security component, trade and economic cooperation, capacity development and education and social, cultural, civil society and people-to-people relations.

Mr. Karzai met Vice-President Hamid Ansari, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi, Union Minister of State for Skill Development Rajiv Pratap Rudy and BJP leader Ram Madhav during his visit.

Visit Of Pak PM to Uzbekistan. Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif during his recent visit to Uzbekistan said that establishment of peace in Afghanistan is inevitable for peace and stability in the region. The Prime Minister further stated that his government desired to maintain good ties with all countries, including India and Afghanistan.

Visit of Gen Raheel Sharif To USA. Pakistan's army chief General Raheel Sharif's meetings with US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter and American military leadership primarily focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan's actions to counter terror. The meetings focused on the situation in Afghanistan, and how there continue to be issues along the border, and what can be done on the Pakistani side of the border as well as within Afghanistan to try and foster a more stable situation. The US Def Secretary conveyed that the US feels strongly about the need to go after groups like the Haqqani Network that US forces operating in Afghanistan.

Militants Killed In Afghanistan Clashes. At least 26 militants were killed in military operations in Afghanistan over two days as Taliban insurgents attempted to overrun the strategically important Yamgan district in Badakhshan province. In addition nineteen insurgents were injured and four others were apprehended.

## IRAN

Capt Ranjit Seth

The widely anticipated nuclear pact between Iran and a consortium of Western nations will bring about a lifting of economic sanctions that have been in place for several years. With the unfreezing of assets around the world, Iran's armed forces will be looking to acquire a number of modern weapon systems, most notably new combat aircraft.

For more than 35 years the Iranian air force has struggled through innovation and adaptive skills, to maintain a fleet of aging American-made aircraft, acquired under the reign of the former Shah of Iran. All spares and after-sales support for its aircraft were terminated when the current clerical

regime came to power in 1979 . The Iranian Air force had to resort to covert and largely illegal mechanisms for getting much-needed spares and it managed through improvising, scrounging, reverse-engineering and fabrication of components that could not be acquired.

IRIAF now operates a varied fleet that includes around 40 of the 79 Grumman Tomcats purchased under the Shah, around 60 F-4D/E Phantoms and a similar number of Northrop F-5E/Fs. Iran took the 24 Dassault Mirage F1s that were flown from Iraq at the end of the Gulf War, and a similar number of Sukhoi Su-24s, a few MiG-29s,( augmented by subsequent deliveries from Russia), and some Su-25s (the latter were recently returned to Iraq to join the fight against Daesh forces). Iran had also bought around 20 Chengdu F-7s from China.

Among the many variety of aircraft that Iran is looking at, it is likely that it may acquire a large number of Su-30MK-series fighter aircraft that may become the backbone of the IRIAF. Iran had also placed an order with Russia for its Almaz-Antei S-300 air defence system (under international pressure and informal agreements with both the U.S. and Israel, Russia has refrained from fulfilling this contract till now). According to Russian officials, Iran will now receive an updated and modernized version of the S-300, designated the Antei-2500.

With Iran opting for major weapons purchases from Russia it appears that its own indigenous programs would be shelved. Both the Azarakhsh, a reverse-engineered variant of the Northrop F-5 and the Sa'eqeh (Thunderbolt), a twin-tail variant of the same design, are not considered adequate for the current-day air combat environment. Similarly the Shafaq (now designated the Borhan in a new configuration) and the Qaher-313, of stealthy design are not likely to see further efforts.

## PAKISTAN

Lt Col Anil Gorshi, SM\*\*

Pak COAS Visit to US. Pakistan chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif concluded his five day US visit and reiterated his resolve to take the anti terrorism war to its logical end. He asserted “Pakistan is absolutely determined to cope with the menaces posed by terrorism. US vice President Joe Biden at White House appreciated Pakistan Contribution in was on terror. Pakistan immense sacrifices both in terms of human lives and economic losses were recognized by US.

Issues Highlighted. Gen Sharif highlighted the need for stepped up Pak Afghan border management and sustained cooperation to deal with emerging threats.

United state Senator MC cain emphasized the need to further reinforce this partnership in view of the emerging development.

Gen Raheel and US Defence sec John Kerry discussed the current situation in Afghanistan with particular reference to the stalled peace talks. Gen Sharif said conducive environment was need for the resumption of stalled Peace talks between Kabul and Afghan Taliban.

Importance of Visit. Gen Raheel visit was given unprecedented importance largely because of military influence on major nation and foreign issues related to US.

CAR

Air Cmde T Chand (Retd)

EU-Eurasian Union Likely Rapprochement. After the G20 summit in Turkey, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker wrote to Russian President Vladimir Putin, suggesting closer trade ties between the EU and the Russian-led Eurasian Union once a ceasefire is implemented in Ukraine. Mr. Juncker underlined the importance he attached to good relations between the European Union and Eurasian Union, which he has not been able to develop over the past year. He reportedly asked Commission officials to study options to bring the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) together. A month ago Juncker caused controversy when he said at an event in Germany that Europe must improve its relationship with Russia and should not let this be decided by Washington. He also stated that Mr. Putin is the President of Russia and there is no security architecture in Europe without an enhanced participation of Russia. Russia has long ago sought to establish an official relation between the EU and Eurasian Union. Developments in Ukraine and Syria have the potential to seriously affect the prospects of the rapprochement and should be keenly watched. In fact, the declaration of the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine, which accompanies the Minsk agreement, foresees creating a joint humanitarian and economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific, which could well be the shape of an EU-Eurasian Union deal.