

ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 31 OCT 2016

China(Continental), China(Maritime), Myanmar, Nepal, Srilanka, Asean, Iraq , Syria, Yemen, Russia, United State Of America

CHINA (CONTINENTAL)

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

The Ever-growing Power of China's Xi Jinping.

At the beginning of this week China's leader Xi Jinping was not officially "at the core" of the Communist Party. Now he is. Why should that matter? Because, in China, little words have big meanings.

Over four days in the Chinese capital a major political meeting has been taking place between a couple of hundred members of the Central Committee. It is known as the Plenum. Such gatherings are usually held once a year and allow the Communist Party to make policy decisions which are later shoved through the National People's Congress for approval.

At this week's Plenum, it was pronounced that Party members should unite around the Central Committee "with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core".

Communism's 'Core'. The expression is already falling off the lips of senior government officials like a religious mantra. There they were at a press conference explaining the plenum decisions and describing concepts as being in step with "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in order to boost the standing of the Communist Party "with Xi Jinping as the core".

A more mind-numbingly dull and uninformative press conference you would struggle to find, even in China. Pre-ordained questions, pre-scripted answers.

What worries China observers is that General Secretary Xi is growing into an untouchable figure the likes of which has not been seen here for quite some time.

This was not the case, for example, with the previous administration of Hu Jintao. Though he too was president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, his was a leadership within a system of collective responsibility. You could imagine a diversity of views amongst the (then nine-member) Politburo Standing Committee.

Since 1949 the most extreme example of an omnipotent ruler was naturally Mao Zedong. When

his disastrous policy known as the Great Leap Forward left millions of people starving to death, Defence Minister Marshal Peng Dehuai challenged him. For this, one of the heroes of the revolution was purged.

Naturally the China of today is nothing like it was in 1959 but the accumulation of power around a single figure "at the core" who cannot be criticised is making plenty of analysts concerned.

Zhuhai Air Show: China has Showcased its Long-Awaited J-20 Stealth Fighter in Public for the First Time. Two of the radar-evading jets performed a 60-second fly-past at the Zhuhai air show in Guangdong province - the country's biggest meeting of plane makers and buyers. The fighters are being seen as symbol of Beijing's desire to modernise and upgrade its military capabilities. President Xi Jinping wants to toughen China's armed forces as it takes a more assertive stance in the region, especially in the South China and East China seas.

The J-20 has been developed and made by the Chengdu Aircraft Industries Group, a subsidiary of Aviation Industry Corporation of China.

Some have likened the new fighter to Lockheed Martin's F-22 Raptor jet, with industry analyst Bradley Perrot of Aviation Week saying the jet was "clearly a big step forward in Chinese combat capability".

It's technological displays like this which will lead plenty of people to imagine a time soon when China catches up with the United States militarily.

These two J-20 stealth fighters made a dramatic entrance at the Zhuhai Air Show. The radar-evading jets came in low showing off their manoeuvrability and setting off alarms in the nearby car park.

It's the first time this country's top-of-the-line fighter jets have been seen in public and it's being viewed as a real statement of intent that China wants to close the technology gap with all other rivals.

Although the J-20 jets passed by several times people won't be allowed to get too close to them at this show. Their design is still top secret so they won't be on display in the way that other aircraft are.

Naturally China will be presenting plenty of other military hardware this week from attack helicopters to seaplanes. The message here is that this ever-emerging power is not to be trifled with. But China also wants to sell equipment to other nations and in this field, too, surpass the United States.

CHINA (MARITIME)

Capt Ranjit Seth

South China Sea- Australia-Indonesia Joint Naval Patrols. Australia is considering joint naval patrols with Indonesia in the contested South China Sea. The Australian foreign minister, Julie Bishop stated on 25 Oct that Indonesia's request for joint patrols at a bilateral meeting in Bali last week was "consistent with our policies of exercising our right of freedom of navigation. That's in accordance with international law and our support for peace and stability in the region". Australia has previously drawn criticism from China for running surveillance flights over disputed islands in the South China Sea and supporting US freedom of navigation exercises there. China last month urged Australia to "speak and act cautiously" on the issue.

Australia and Indonesia already conduct joint patrols in the Timor Sea as part of the countries' partnership on combating people smuggling and illegal fishing. FM Bishop said Australia and Indonesia would notify other countries in the region of any planned exercise.

However Indonesia's defence ministry said it was no more than a proposal at this stage. "There's no agreement yet."

Australia also reiterated support for Indonesia's push to secure a code of conduct for the hotly contested waters – something that has remained elusive for more than a decade.

Philippines Changes Equations in the South China Sea. President Rodrigo Duterte called upon the US to treat the Philippines with respect. "I'd like to send this message once again for the last time... you talk to us as if we're still under your colony, as if we are your pawns that you'll only give aid to depending on many conditions". This statement following a series of earlier egregious ones has the likely effect of changing alignments in the South China Sea.

China and Russia will make the most of this strategic rethink by President Duterte. President Duterte clearly stated that both China and Russia had offered him all the help that he requires. Last week President Duterte declared in Beijing his breaking of ties from America and announced it would be China, Russia and the Philippines "against the world".

With President Duterte alienating the Philippines from the US, it is quite likely that US forces would not be welcome in Palawan air base or Subic Bay port in Philippines. These bases are important to the US in projecting power in the South China Sea region, especially since China has three military bases in the Spratly Islands (100 miles away from the Palawan base).

South China Sea -Chinese Vessels Leave Disputed Sea. After Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte forged friendlier ties with China, the tension in the South China Sea has started to mellow down as evidenced by the retreat of some Chinese vessels in the highly disputed maritime zone. The Philippines are witnessing unimpeded access to the marine-resources rich sea since the past four years. Philippines fishermen have noticed a significant change in the atmosphere. “Since three days ago there are no longer Chinese ships, coastguard or navy, in the Scarborough area. If the Chinese ships have left then it means our fishermen can resume fishing in the area,” defence officials stated

The loosening of tension in the highly contested waters came amid the decision of the UN-sanctioned tribunal in The Hague, which favoured the Philippines’ claim in parts of the disputed sea within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The issue stemmed from the maritime dispute case filed by President Duterte’s predecessor, President Benigno Aquino III in 2013, which made the Manila-Beijing ties sour over the past years.

Zhuhai Air Show. China’s newest warplane — the J-20 stealth fighter — will make its first public flight at the Zhuhai Air Show, The J-20, manufactured by China’s state aerospace company AVIC will make its first public flight demonstration. China’s only international aerospace exhibition, held biennially in the southern city of Zhuhai, this year will have the largest-ever display of military hardware and aircraft, 151 aircraft from 700 exhibitors from 42 countries.

Swift, stealthy, and armed with long-range missiles, the new J-20s represent a leap forward in China’s ability to project power in Asia.

China is modernising its armed forces to project power in regions such as the South China Sea, a resource-rich waterway where it has disputes with several neighbours.

The show will also see the debut of the Y-20 transport aircraft, which can move heavy loads and carry out airlifts to assist military ops. Chinese-made military assault vehicles, anti-aircraft missile systems, drones and fighter jets are also on display at the exhibition centre.

China is aggressively moving to develop its domestic weapons industry, drones and anti-aircraft systems and jet engines. AVIC chief has said that his company had business in 80 countries, with annual overseas sales exceeding 80 billion yuan (\$11.8 billion).

MYANMAR

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

Myanmar's leader Aung San SuuKywi is facing mounting criticism in her government handling of a human right crisis situation in the Muslim-majority northern Rakhine State. A team comprising senior diplomats from U.S., U.K., China and some European states is visiting Myanmar for on ground assessment of the situation.

Of late, there have been reports of military excesses on the stateless Rohingya Muslims community of the Rakhine state adjoining Bangladesh. While SuuKywi effectively controls the civil state administration through her protégé, President HtinKyaw, she apparently is helpless where army is concerned. The reason for this that, she cannot go against the army which still retains veto power with its 25% strength in both houses of the parliament. Apart from this, she is cautious of the reaction of the local Buddhist majority which has acrimonious relations with the Muslims whom they do not consider as natives of Myanmar

The prevailing conditions have nurtured insurgency from the Rohingya community, who regularly attack border posts which leads to further intervention by the security forces. To solve the problem firstly, Myanmar has to address Rohingya stateless issue to get them in the national mainstream then, coordinate with the neighbouring states, India and Bangladesh to tackle all insurgent groups.

Terror groups like ISIS/Al Qaeda are on look out for such as disgruntled groups such as Rohingya to recruit new members. This is considered serious as the neighboring states India and Bangladesh are both affected by terrorism. The coordination between various terror groups could present a challenge to all these states. In a cover story, Diplomat reported that Pakistan based Jaish-e- Mohammed had even tried roping in members of Rohingya Solidarity organization (RSO), a terror group of Myanmar in its fold. If successful it could become a serious issue.

India and Myanmar hold common views on terrorism. Both have sought early finalization of the comprehensive convention on International terrorism. This was affirmed by SuuKywi during her meeting with our PM at the sidelines of recently held BRICS conference at Goa.

NEPAL

Col Harpreet Singh

Lonely Planet Crowns Nepal as World's 'Best Value Destination' for 2017. Nepal has been named on top 'Best Value Destination' and 5th on the top 10 countries in the world to visit in 2017, according to Lonely Planet's Annual Best in Travel list released on Tuesday.

Nepal is the only destination in South Asia that has been featured in Lonely Planet's Top Ten Destinations Guidebook.

The world's leading travel guide Lonely Planet says, "Even natural disasters can't keep Nepal down for long. The 2015 earthquakes caused devastation, but what is most striking from a traveller's perspective is not how much was lost but how much remains."

"Landmark temples crumbled, but others came through with just the odd tile out of place, and whole swathes of the country escaped serious damage, including most of the popular trekking trails."

It added, "Nepal has all the skills required to repair monuments and infrastructure, but what it does need is income. By visiting Nepal now and supporting local culture and people, you could help a nation rebuild and bounce back even stronger."

Among the top ten countries, Canada is number one followed by Colombia, Finland, Dominica, Bermuda, Mongolia Oman, Myanmar and Ethiopia.

On its selection process, Lonely Planet writes, "Amid fierce debate, the list is whittled down by our panel of travel experts to just 10 countries, 10 regions and 10 cities that travellers must visit in the year ahead. Each destination is chosen for its topicality, unique experiences and 'wow' factor. We don't just report on the trends, we set them—helping you get there before the crowds do."

As per the meeting held between Deepak Raj Joshi, CEO of Nepal Tourism Board and Lonely Planet Team in Delhi on October 24, both parties have agreed to work in partnership by signing agreement in near future for promotion of Nepal's tourism.

Comments. It is a good sign for Nepal and the Lonely Planet rating will boost the Tourism industry which had taken a hit after last year's earthquake. India may like to find out what Nepal is doing right as far as tourism is concerned and try to implement the same.

Foreign Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat Meets His Indian Counterpart Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi. The fourth meeting of Nepal-India Joint Commission at Foreign Minister Level focused on implementing the past agreements signed between the two countries. The meeting took place in New Delhi on 27 Oct 16. The meeting comes at a time when the India-funded projects could not make tangible progress. The joint panel is the highest level bilateral mechanism between the

two neighbours that is mandated to review bilateral ties, direct relevant officials to resolve the pending issues and chart out the future course of the ties.

Foreign Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat co-chaired the meeting with his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj. The Nepali delegation includes Foreign Secretary and other senior government officials.

“The meeting will make a comprehensive review of the bilateral ties,” said Minister Mahat on Tuesday. The two countries had agreed on most of the issues and agendas during recent high-level visits, he added. “We want to see tangible progress on India funded projects in Nepal and want their early execution.” The two countries have recently formed a joint mechanism to expedite the pace of India funded projects in Nepal.

Mahat said that bilateral matters like India funded roads, cross border connectivity (railways, roads and bridges), water resources, inundation, security matters, boundary row, completing the detailed project report of the much-touted Pancheshwar Development Authority that is executing the 4,800MW hydropower project in Nepal were discussed during the meeting.

The Indian side discussed security related matters like signing of Extradition Treaty along with Mutual Legal Assistance, curbing criminal activities in the bordering areas and sharing information on illicit activities among others.

“But chances of signing the extradition agreement any time soon are slim,” Mahat said.

On inundation issue, Nepal told India that natural flow of water should be ensured and it should not be stopped.

Nepal sought a field office in Visakhapatnam port area to use the port for export and import for third country and will seek Indian markets to various Nepali products.

Issues like construction of integrated check posts at the Nepal-India border, power trade, implementation of Mahakali Treaty, road connectivity, construction of cross border petroleum pipeline, compensation of various victims affected by inundation, trade, transit and fixing the modality of Indian reconstruction aid to Nepal featured in the meeting, Mahat explained.

On reconstruction front, India has proposed to use a portion of its grant to rebuild houses damaged by the earthquakes in Gorkha and Nuwakot.

On boundary issues, Nepal and India will seek some changes to the design of pillars located in the areas along river banks though the both sides have achieved progress in installing the boundary pillars.

“The progress made by the technical team in boundary pillar installation and clearing the No-man’s land will be reviewed,” said Mahat.

The Nepali side will also tell the Indian side that Nepal will build the Sunkoshi Diversion, splitting it from the SaptaKoshiMulti Purpose Project. Any remaining glitches in the implementation of the Power Trade Agreement between Nepal and India will be ironed out, Mahat said.

SRI LANKA

Col Saikat Roy

Chinese Firm to Get 80% of Hambantota Port. Sri Lanka will sell to a Chinese company 80% of a \$1.5 billion port in its south, in a bid to cut the country’s debt burden, Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake said. “For somebody like the Chinese, it is the silk route transit point,” Karunanayake told a meeting of the country’s Foreign Correspondents Association.

The Hambantota port was built with the help of Chinese loans and contractors in 2010, as part of efforts to boost development of infrastructure after the conclusion of a 26-year-long civil war in 2009. But the port, and a nearby airport, also Chinese-financed, had been seen as a white elephant because it was not financially viable.

The move follows an offer made by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe during a visit to China in April, to swap equity in Sri Lankan infrastructure projects against some of the \$8 billion in debt the Indian Ocean Island owes to China. Karunanayake said that a Chinese port operator would get 80 percent of the port stake and that the money from the deal will be used to repay expensive foreign loans.

China’s interest in the port makes some countries, including India and the United States, nervous, with Sri Lanka sitting near shipping lanes through which much of the world’s trade passes en route to China and Japan.

IA MODERNIZATION

Col Saikat Roy

Assault Rifles, Body Armour and Helmets for Soldiers. Defence Ministry plans to procure modern assault rifles, body armour, helmets for soldiers from foreign shores. The move is part of PM Modi's \$250 billion push to modernize the armed forces. The ministry may be purchasing 185,000 assault rifles from global markets. The ministry also plans to buy hundreds of thousands of helmets and tens of thousands of modern bullet proof vests.

The ministry's choice is 7.62mm model which will "shoot to kill". India will issue a tender to procure the rifles in April 2017. India needs 65,000 rifles within 28 months of signing the contract and has asked global manufacturers to reply by November 7.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Col Saikat Roy

INS Arihant Inducted. The Indian Navy and the Defence Ministry on Tuesday maintained silence on induction of its first nuclear submarine Arihant in the force, even as sources indicated the vessel has been inducted. Asked about the induction, officials refused to comment on or off record. Neither Defence Ministry officials, nor the Indian Navy confirmed or denied the media reports on induction of the vessel. However, they indicated that the boat is now part of the Indian Naval fleet, but did not divulge the exact date of induction. Asked about the possible reasons for the secrecy, former Navy Chief Admiral Arun Prakash (Retired) said the secrecy around the induction of the vessel, being a nuclear submarine, was "customary". "Arihant is an achievement technology wise, but otherwise it is a top secret," he said.

The submarine, the lead ship of India's Arihant-class of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, has been designed based on the Russian Akula-1 class submarines. "Its mission is to be a nuclear deterrent. Everything to do with the submarine will be a secret. Its movement, position and location will not even be known to the Navy," said Admiral Prakash.

The submarine completes India's nuclear triad giving it the capability to respond to nuclear strikes from sea, land and air-based systems. India currently operates Russian-origin nuclear-powered submarine INS Chakra, which it leased for 10 years from Russia in 2012.

ASEAN

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

ASEAN to Boost Quality of Higher Education in the Region. ASEAN and the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia recognised the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) and

its role in higher education quality assurance development and practice in ASEAN during the opening of the Fourth Policy Dialogue on the ASEAN-EU Support to Higher Education in ASEAN Region (SHARE) Programme on 26 October. AQAN became an entity associated with ASEAN in August 2016 and will support the work of the ASEAN education sector in the future.

Attended by 160 university officials, quality assurance experts and students, the Fourth SHARE Policy Dialogue focused on the theme “Towards a shared Understanding of Quality Assurance in ASEAN.” The participants discussed quality assurance in higher education as a key component of education harmonisation and promotion of accountability, comparability and visibility towards a credible higher education system in ASEAN. ASEAN and European experts shared perspectives on quality assurance systems and experiences in plenary and small group workshops.

“As we continue to encourage free movement of goods, services and people in ASEAN, it is imperative to assure that the quality of our higher education is at par with agreed international and regional standards; and that our education systems thrive in a culture of quality and credibility,” said Vongthep Arthakaivalvatee, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

Conference participants acknowledged that mobility of students and graduates within ASEAN requires mutual trust among all countries. It involves confidence in the education systems including the qualifications and competencies of ASEAN students and graduates. This is possible if AMS discuss, enhance and agree on common and comparable frameworks and standards.

Malaysian Vice Minister for Higher Education, Datuk Mary Yap KainChing stressed the important role of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education which was adopted by the ASEAN Leaders during the 27th ASEAN Summit in November 2015 and upholds quality in the provision of higher education across all ASEAN Member States.

EU Ambassador to ASEAN Francisco Fontan and AQAN President Rear Admiral

WacharaKarunyavanij also graced the opening ceremony of the policy dialogue and expressed support to the development of quality higher education in ASEAN.

Highlighting the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework which was produced by the AQAN, the policy dialogue focused on four key areas that require quality assurance in higher education including internal quality assurance, external quality assurance, standards and processes, and national qualifications framework. Opportunities and challenges were also discussed and how existing standards and procedures such as the AQAF should be utilised in harmony and to complement quality assurance standards of the ASEAN countries.

The policy dialogue acknowledged the role of the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education

and the ASEAN Secretariat in providing more platforms for advocacy, information sharing and collaboration on quality assurance, facilitating the establishment of clear quality assurance governance and structure.

WEST ASIA

Brig Ranjit Singh

IRAQ

Offensive to Retake Mosul Launched. A major offensive to retake Mosul from ISIS has been launched by Iraqi security forces, duly supported by International Coalition led by US, in the second half of Oct 2016. Approx 100,000 troops are participating in the offensive, which is logistically supported by almost 60 countries. The progress of operations in last 15 days has been better than expected, the city of Mosul has been surrounded from all directions, the noose is being tightened rapidly. The Iraqi forces have gained major successes which include the following:-

- Mosul State TV office has been liberated from ISIS, anti-terror forces have entered in to the first district of the city.
- The Joint Forces have liberated approx 1440 Sq Km of area, killing 1300 ISIS elements.
- Joint Forces have advanced close to west of Mosul, close to the city.
- Security Forces have advanced towards west coast of Mosul from three axes.
- Large numbers of villages have been liberated in all the directions towards Mosul by the Federal Police, Peshmerga Forces, Badr Organisation and Shia Militia.

US Led Coalition Air Strikes. The US led Coalition has been carrying out large scale intense airstrikes against ISIS targets in Mosul, creating large scale destruction to the outfit. As per the spokesperson of US Coalition, Mosul will be liberated soon, reassured the people about the early success of the offensive.

Armed Uprising Against SIS in Mosul. An armed rebellion against ISIS has been reported in Mosul, wherein armed people have attacked ISIS patrols, killing some guards, some unknown snipers have been targeting ISIS elements, with success. Group of rebels are also reported to have attacked ISIS HQ, killing some guards and burning vehicles.

Failed Coup Attempt against Baghdadi in Mosul. A failed coup attempt against Baghdadi by Islamic Police, has been reported in Mosul. The conspirators have been eliminated. ISIS media cell has been reporting presence of Baghdadi in Mosul, to lift morale of its fighters.

Defections from ISIS. ISIS has been coming down very heavily against defections from ISIS, a large number of its elements have been eliminated for trying to escape or refusing to fight in Mosul. Some elements are reported to have escaped in civilian clothes.

Wanton Killings by ISIS in Mosul. ISIS has been using civilians as human shields in the operations. ISIS has resorted to large scale wanton killing of civilians in Mosul.

Comments. The major offensive to liberate Mosul has been launched in the second half of Oct 2016. Approx, 100,000 troops are participating in the offensive, the operations are progressing faster than expected.

The defeat of ISIS is imminent; ISIS has been fearing revolt in its ranks and taken several measures to prevent it. However, large scale defections are expected as the operations progress closer to central Mosul. There are signs of armed uprising against ISIS, which would intensify with the progress of operations. This would hasten the progress of operation. ISIS has been using civilians as human shields, to delay the operations.

It is expected that with progress of operations, ISIS resistance is likely to crumble due to defection in the ranks and armed rebellion brewing amongst the people.

The operations could be expected to culminate earlier than expected. Due to large number of IDPs, a humanitarian crisis is looming large as the operations gain momentum for capture of Mosul. However, if the operations culminate at an early date the situation could be handled, but if prolonged, the humanitarian crisis would further accentuate.

SYRIA

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YEMEN

Govt not Ready to Accept UN Peace Proposal. The Hadi Govt has refused to accept UN sponsored peace proposal, which recommends resignation of President and Vice President, Hadi becomes a figurehead leader, after handing over powers to a new consensus Vice President. Govt has rejected the plan stating that Houthi rebels should put in to effect, UNSC Resolution 2216, a new constitution is approved and elections are held. The UN Resolution 2216, demands that the rebels should lay down arms and withdraw from all areas held by them, before talks can commence..

Hodeida Province Declared Disaster Area. The Governor has declared, Red Sea Province, Hodeida Province, as a disaster area due to rising cases of famine. The province has received almost 3 lakh displaced people from war torn areas since the unrest. There is a requirement of 3,50,000 food baskets monthly and one lakh meals daily.

Four Iranian Arms Shipments to Yemen Stopped. The US Navy has intercepted four Iranian arms shipment to war torn Yemen since Apr. The shipments contain thousands of AK-47 Rifles, anti-tank missiles, sniper rifles and high end weapon systems.

Govt Shifts Central Bank. The Govt has shifted Central Bank from rebel held capital city of Sana'a to Aden. The rebels have been diverting funds from the foreign reserves, to the tune of 100 million US dollars per month, depleting the country's reserves. The rebels have now stopped salaries to the employees in Sana'a.

Intense fighting between Govt forces and Houthi rebels continues in the Marib Province, east of capital city of Sana'a.

Comments. UN sponsored peace plan has been rejected by the Hadi Govt, as it aims to completely sideline the President. The proposal will not be accepted by the Govt at any cost. The stalemate is expected to continue in Yemen, no immediate solution is in sight.

The shifting of Central Bank by Hadi Govt from Sana'a to Aden, would create problem of funding for Houthi rebels, may make their campaign unsustainable in due course.

Iranian arms supplies to the Houthi rebels has been cut-off, it would be very difficult for Iran to smuggle weapons in to Yemen, through sea routes, due to presence of US Navy, off the coast of Yemen.

Humanitarian disaster is brewing in several parts of Yemen, particularly in Taiz and Hodeida Provinces.

RUSSIA

Col Harpreet Singh

Russia Sends its Aircraft Carrier to Middle East. Somewhere in the autumn gales and rain squalls of the North Sea, Russia's only aircraft carrier is heading south to war. The Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier and seven more vessels sailed Saturday from the Northern Fleet's Arctic headquarters of Severomorsk. It's the eighth time the ship and its escorts have made the journey to the Mediterranean, a trip that has become a key part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's strategy to reassert Moscow's naval strength and reach.

This deployment, though, is very different. Moscow has spent considerable resources over the last decade developing the ability to conduct operations from the carrier, launched in the dying days of the Soviet Union. But unlike its U.S., French, British and Italian counterparts, it has never used the ship in anger. That's about to change. Perhaps within as little as two weeks, its SU-33 and MiG-29 jets will be slamming ordinance into downtown Aleppo and other parts of Syria.

On one level, the Kremlin has no particular need to use carrier-mounted aircraft. If it wanted to increase the number of aircraft operating over Syria, it could simply send more ground-based jets to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's airfields.

Sending the carrier and its escorts is in many ways a much more expensive and complex way of achieving the same thing. Nor is it without risk – in the past, Russia's warships have sometimes shown an alarming tendency to break down, often traveling with their own oceangoing tugs.

On previous passages through the North Sea, the carrier has deliberately operated jets and aircraft close by Norwegian oil platforms, an act of intimidation that forced nearby civilian helicopters to be grounded. This time, there are reports the carrier may conduct bombing exercises in international waters north of Scotland.

Royal Navy warships will shadow the Russians as they pass down the coast and through the English Channel, a move that will likely attract considerable media coverage on both sides.

Russia's senior naval commanders will be hoping this deployment strengthens their hand in face-offs between branches of the military. Until now, most of the glory in recent military campaigns – Ukraine in the last two years, Georgia in 2008, Chechnya, or now Syria – has gone to ground and air forces. Now they can showcase themselves – as well as building the necessary skills and capabilities to develop a truly enduring carrier strike capability.

With Russia maintaining a permanent naval presence off Syria since 2013, the United States and its allies were already keeping track of exactly what the refurbished Russian Navy could and couldn't do. China, too, will also unquestionably be interested – its first aircraft carrier, Liaoning, was originally the Soviet Varyag, sister ship to the Kuznetsov.

Both Moscow and Beijing have plowed considerable resources into weaponry to take out U.S. carriers – indeed, developing such technology has been at least as important to them as getting their own aircraft carriers operational. U.S. officials, however, say that latest generation of anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles remain largely unproven.

The United States and its allies have their own tools to take out enemy carriers – and, decades more experience practicing such tactics. The U.S. Navy might be spread thin across the globe, but it could still put together enough combat power – be it in submarines, surface warships or land-based aircraft – to do the job.

It wouldn't be easy. The main focus of the Kuznetsov battle group may be hitting targets on the ground in Syria, but it is also relatively capable of defending itself against maritime foes. The carrier is also reported to be carrying up to a dozen antisubmarine helicopters, making it much harder for any NATO submarine to sneak in close. According to Russian media, the group also contains the battle cruiser Peter the Great as well as two anti-submarine warships. They too could be sunk – but would almost certainly take NATO warships with them.

All of this feeds back into the battle on the ground that counts – that for the future of Syria in general and Aleppo in particular. Already, the United States knows that halting the onslaught of Russian and Syrian forces might well take military action – at the very least, shooting down a handful of aircraft or targeting airbases.

Comments. A Russian carrier conducting strike operations in the Mediterranean doesn't just reassert Moscow's power, it further complicates the world's geopolitics. And that's precisely what Vladimir Putin wants.

Moscow clearly wishes to show that it can emulate Washington by sending a task force thousands of miles and then conducting weeks or months of military activity – an exercise that will highlight Russia's renewed military capability. It will further complicate the political calculus for the United States and others when it comes to finding a way forward in Syria. And, of course, it offers a neat opportunity to remind a host of countries in northern Europe that Moscow cannot be ignored.

UK and US to Send Jets and Troops to Russian Border with Europe. Britain said on Wednesday it will send fighter jets to Romania next year and the United States promised troops, tanks and artillery to Poland in NATO's biggest military build-up on Russia's borders since the Cold War. Germany, Canada and other NATO allies also pledged forces at a defense ministers meeting in Brussels on the same day two Russian warships armed with cruise missiles entered the Baltic Sea between Sweden and Denmark, underscoring East-West tensions.

In Madrid, the foreign ministry said Russia had withdrawn a request to refuel three warships in Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta after NATO allies said they could be used to target civilians in Syria.

The ships were part of an eight-ship carrier battle group - including Russia's sole aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov - that is expected to join around 10 other Russian vessels already off the Syrian coast, diplomats said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the troop contributions to a new 4,000-strong force in the Baltics and Eastern Europe were a measured response to what the alliance believes are some 330,000 Russian troops stationed on Russia's western flank near Moscow.

"This month alone, Russia has deployed nuclear-capable Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad and suspended a weapons-grade plutonium agreement with the United States," Stoltenberg said, also accusing Russia of continued support for rebels in Ukraine.

Those ballistic missiles can hit targets across Poland and the Baltics, although NATO officials declined to say if Russia had moved nuclear warheads to Kaliningrad.

NATO's aim is to make good on a July promise by NATO leaders to deter Russia in Europe's ex-

Soviet states, after Moscow orchestrated the annexation of the Crimea peninsula in 2014.

NATO's plan is to set up four battle groups with a total of some 4,000 troops from early next year, backed by a 40,000-strong rapid-reaction force, and if need be, follow-on forces.

As part of that, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced a "battle-ready battalion task force" of about 900 soldiers would be sent to eastern Poland, as well as another, separate force equipped with tanks and other heavy equipment to move across eastern Europe.

"It's a major sign of the U.S. commitment to strengthening deterrence here," Carter said.

Britain's Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said Britain would send an 800-strong battalion to Estonia, supported by French and Danish troops, starting from May. The United States wants its troops in position by June.

London is also sending Typhoon fighter aircraft to Romania to patrol around the Black Sea, partly in support of Turkey.

"Although we are leaving the European Union, we will be doing more to help secure the eastern and southern flanks of NATO," Fallon said.

Others NATO allies joined the four battle groups led by the United States, Germany, Britain and Canada to go to Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. Canada said it was sending 450 troops to Latvia, joined by 140 military personnel from Italy.

Germany said it was sending between 400 and 600 troops to Lithuania, with additional forces from the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium, Croatia and Luxembourg.

But NATO's troop announcements in the Baltic states and Poland were partly overshadowed by the dispute about whether Spain should refuel the Russian warships, which was later resolved by Moscow's decision to withdraw its request.

NATO's tensions with Russia have been building since Crimea and the West's decision to impose retaliatory sanctions.

But the breakdown of a U.S.-Russia brokered ceasefire in Syria on Oct. 3, followed by U.S. accusations that Russia has used cyber attacks to disrupt the presidential election, have signaled a worsening of ties.

Even before the break down of the Syrian ceasefire, Russian President Vladimir Putin suspended a treaty with Washington on cleaning up weapons-grade plutonium, signaling he was willing to use nuclear disarmament as a new bargaining chip in disputes with the United States over Ukraine and Syria.

Comments. For the Kremlin, the U.S.-led alliance's plans are already too much given Russia's grievances at NATO's expansion eastwards. As long as Putin is there it is unlikely that any kind of muscle flexing will really deter Russia from its aim in Syria.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

On 02 Nov16, in the currency market the dollar hit its lowest level in more than three weeks against the euro, yen, Swiss franc and sterling reflecting a nervousness about a potential victory for U.S. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. Even Indian stock market displayed negative sentiments after a report that in some opinion poll, that Donald trump has edged forward the democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton.

What are the causes for such negative reaction?

Clinton will give continuity in American foreign policy, international trade and the domestic economy. Whereas; there is greater uncertainty over these if a Trump wins.

In Asia, U.S. sees ahead a very competitive China which by some estimates is likely to edge past U.S. in economic and even military strength in 10 years' time. This expectation has made China more aggressive in its dealings with other nations. Its aggressive stance in South China Sea is one such example. Philippines which had contested and got favourable ruling on the issue of the Scarborough shoal in the international tribunal, even sought reconciliation with China in recognition of china's growing clout which already has Cambodia and Laos in its camp from ASEAN grouping . US perceives that it cannot handle china alone thus would involve the Asian states to contain its challenge. Leaving aside the rhetoric about being natural partners, our common interests in the region especially, the aggressive china has brought both India- US close. In the bargain, our position in Asia has dramatically improved thanks to the country's partnership with the United States. Hillary is expected to provide continuity to it but, with Trump winning, this remains uncertain.