

ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 01 AUG – 15 AUG 2017

China (Continental),China (MARITIME),Pakistan, Bangladesh, Srilanka,Nepal,Afganistan,Myanmar,Russia,United States Of America

CHINA (CONTINENTAL)

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

Three Warfares: China's Ace Weapon.

13 Aug 2017

China might be employing the “Three Warfares” (san zhongzhanfa) concept to wrest Doklam. The concept was reinforced in 2010. Aimed at influencing public opinion and using legal arguments that are all a part of sy-ops, Three Warfares has been a critical component of China's approach in the South China Sea and beyond. It is now being applied in the Indian context where China has sought to turn its unilateral violation of status quo at Doklam into victimhood. China has been adept at producing maps and quoting historical precedents to build a legal argument and its media offensive has seen it regularly threaten Indian forces with eviction. The moves to establish territorial and regional suzerainty, however, have often been seen as revisionist orientation in Chinese power. In 2016, the concept was at work after the UNCLOS tribunal ruled against China missing its claims in the South China Sea. Though Philippines achieved a major international victory against a more powerful neighbour, China, with its application of the Three Warfares, successfully co-opted its president, Rodrigo Duterte, after he assumed office in 2016. Beijing also successfully played on his animosity to former US President Obama. A year later, China has emerged victorious; nobody mentions the UNCLOS let loose a barrage of statements to dissuade India from its actions at the site. With every Indian media outlet amplifying the Chinese message, the idea is to use Indians to pressure their own government and make them back off. Closely related is the psychological warfare — calling the Indian foreign minister a “liar” to saying the “countdown (to war) had begun”; assertions that China would rescind its decision on Sikkim or “free” Sikkim from Indian oppression; or that it could interfere in J&K. All this is intended to “undermine India's ability to conduct combat operations through psychological means aimed at terrifying, shocking and demoralising enemy military personnel.” Suddenly, pictures of 1962 are being flashed through Chinese media. Some commentaries even claimed such was the anger among its citizens, that 1962 veterans are ready to send their children to fight

India. The Indian non-response has proved deflating for China. India's China experts have led the way and even the opposition has refused to react. That has shaped Indian public opinion somewhat. In 2016, the three warfare operations exerted a strong "psychological frightening force" on everyone connected with the South China Sea issue — justifying China's rejection of it as a defence of "international justice". So China the rule-breaker suddenly became China the rule defender.

Bhutan Asks India to Resolve Doklam Border Standoff Amicably with China.
August 11, 2017 Amid the border tension in Doka La (Doklam), Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj met her Bhutanese counterpart Damcho Dorji in Kathmandu on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) Ministerial meeting. Both sides discussed the border standoff at the India-Bhutan- China tri-junction. Speaking to the press after the meeting, the Bhutanese foreign minister said, "We hope the situation in Doklam will be resolved peacefully and amicably". This was the first meeting between the two ministers since the Doklam crisis broke out. This meeting also comes at a time when China has been upping the ante with its media blitzkrieg of opinion pieces and articles in the Chinese mouthpieces as well as regular statements from the Chinese foreign ministry "warning" India of dire consequences if it does not withdraw troops from Doklam. This is also the first time that there has been an official reaction from the Bhutanese side since the press release that the Bhutan's foreign ministry put out on June 29 which read, "Bhutan has conveyed to the Chinese side, both on the ground and through the diplomatic channel, that the construction of the road inside Bhutanese territory is a direct violation of the agreements and affects the process of demarcating the boundary between our two countries. Bhutan hopes that the status quo in the Doklam area will be maintained as before 16 June 2017." The crisis began in mid-June when Indian forces prevented Chinese troops from building a road in Doka La (Doklam), an area which is disputed between Bhutan and China.

North Korea: China Urges Trump not to Worsen Situation. 12 August 2017 China's President Xi Jinping has urged Donald Trump and North Korea to avoid "words and actions" that worsen tensions, state media say. Mr Trump and North Korea have been exchanging hostile rhetoric, with the US president threatening to rain "fire and fury" on the North. But China, North Korea's only major ally, has been urging restraint. A White House statement said the US and China agreed North Korea must stop "provocative and escalatory behaviour". A statement by North Korea's official KCNA news agency issued on Saturday said the Trump administration "had better talk and act properly," if it did not want "the American empire to meet its tragic doom". Long-standing tensions over North Korea's nuclear programme worsened when it tested two intercontinental ballistic missiles in July. The regime was also angered by last week's UN

decision to increase economic sanctions against it. According to Chinese state media, Mr Xi told Mr Trump in a phone call that "all relevant parties" should stop "words and deeds" that would exacerbate the situation. Mr Xi also stressed China and the US shared "common interests" over denuclearisation and maintaining peace on the Korean peninsula. A White House statement on the phone call did not mention the apparent plea to the US president. It stressed the two men enjoyed a close relationship, which would "hopefully lead to a peaceful resolution of the North Korea problem". President Trump has previously chided China for not reining in North Korea, saying it could do "a lot more". From "Fire and Fury" to "Locked and Loaded". Tuesday: "North Korea, best not make any more threats to the United States," Mr Trump tells reporters. "They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen". Wednesday: Mr Trump boasts that the US nuclear arsenal is "more powerful than ever". Thursday: He says that his "fire and fury" warning maybe "wasn't tough enough". Asked what would be tougher than fire and fury, he replies, "you'll see". Friday: The US president warns that military solutions are "locked and loaded" should North Korea "act unwisely". North Korea has announced plans to fire missiles near the Pacific territory of Guam, but there is no indication an attack is imminent. On Friday, Mr Trump issued a fresh threat against North Korea, saying it should expect "big, big trouble" if anything happened to Guam. But he added: "Hopefully, it will all work out. Nobody loves a peaceful solution better than President Trump that I can tell you." Mr Trump also called the governor of Guam on Friday to reassure him that his island was safe. "We are with you 1,000%," Mr Trump said in the phone call, recorded and posted on YouTube by Governor Eddie Calvo. Pyongyang has accused Mr Trump of "driving" the Korean peninsula to the "brink of a nuclear war". Russia said the exchange of threats between Washington and North Korea worried Moscow "very much". Germany has also expressed alarm. China's WeChat, Weibo and Baidu under Investigation China says it is investigating its largest social media platforms - Weibo, WeChat and BaiduTieba - for alleged violations of cyber security laws. The Cyberspace Administration said people had been using the three platforms to spread terror-related material, rumours and obscenities. The breaches "jeopardised national security," the administration said. China's authorities heavily censor the internet, routinely blocking content or search terms they consider sensitive. Weibo is a Twitter-like microblogging site, WeChat is an instant messaging mobile app and BaiduTieba is a popular discussion forum. They are all reported to have hundreds of millions of active users. China's Cyberspace Administration accused internet users of "spreading violence, terror, false rumours, pornography and other hazards to national security, public safety,

and social order" on the three platforms. Baidu expressed "regret" and said it would "actively co-operate with government departments" and "increase the intensity of auditing", Reuters reported. There was no immediate comment from Tencent, which owns WeChat, or Weibo. Analysis. Weibo, WeChat and Baidu's Tieba are among the most powerful social media platforms in the world, each attracting hundreds of millions of users in China. In China, posts are easily traceable through registered phone numbers and most people already know well the topics and opinions to steer clear of. But despite the tight surveillance and censorship, dissent still bubbles away and, ahead of a highly sensitive Communist Party Congress this autumn, the authorities are tightening those controls further. The move to place the three platforms under investigation will almost certainly prompt the sites' owners to do even more to police their own content. Last month 60 popular celebrity gossip sites were closed overnight for corrupting "core socialist values," and a new regulation released in May requires all online news portals to be managed by Communist Party-sanctioned editorial staff.

CHINA (MARITIME)

Capt (IN) Ranjit Seth

China Using Underwater Drones in the South China Sea on Large Scale. China has deployed underwater drones in the strategic waterway for scientific purposes, but the technology could be used for military purposes. Information about underwater terrain, salinity and thermal layers are extremely useful for planning and executing submarine and anti-submarine operations. China has been deploying disruptive technology that could strengthen its territorial ambitions in the South China Sea. Last month, it deployed a dozen underwater drones (unmanned underwater vehicles) in the international waterway to carry out "scientific observations". The torpedo-shaped vehicles — called Haiyi, or sea wings — could remain underwater for a month. In March, one device hit a depth of 6,329 meters, breaking an earlier record held by a U.S. vessel. The U.S. Navy employs around 130 such drones to collect oceanographic data. Last year, the Chinese navy seized one that was active in the South China Sea. Underwater drones are a demonstration of maritime strength and one of the many ways China is attempting to challenge the existing world order. MARITIME SECURITY & IN MODERNISATION Capt (IN) Ranjit Seth

Modernisation of Indian Armed Forces with US Assistance. Commander of the US Pacific Command or PACOM Admiral Harry Harris has offered the US help to India to modernise its military, saying that together they can improve India's military capabilities in significant and meaningful ways. The Admiral said he is fairly happy with the level of defence cooperation that exists today between the two sides. Over the past decade, the defence trade between the US and

India has touched nearly \$15 billion and is expected to gallop in the next few years, as India is looking at the US for some of the latest military hardware including fighter jets, latest unmanned aerial vehicles and aircraft carriers. Admiral Harry Harris said, "I believe that the US is ready to help India modernise its military. India has been designated a major defence partner of the US. This is a strategic declaration that's unique to India and the US. It places India on the same level that we have many of our treaty allies". The US has been partners with India in the Malabar exercise series for a number of years. He noted that the exercise, and its complexity has improved steadily over the years. He was very pleased that Japan is part of Malabar and advocated for Australia too joining this group. Adm Harris reiterated that he believes that the deepening US-India relationship is the defining strategic partnership for the 21st century.

PAKISTAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

ISIS 'Outsourcing' Terror Attacks to Pak-based Outfits: UN Report. The 20th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team was submitted to the UN Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee. The committee noted that in South Asia, the al-Qaida's core continues to compete with the Islamic State, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), for dominance over terrorist groups in the region. "ISIL in Afghanistan tends to enlist partners of convenience and 'outsourcing' terrorist attacks to other groups such as Lashkar-i- Jhangvi, and Jamaat-ul- Ahrar, a Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan splinter group," the report said. It said that the al-Qaida core and its regional affiliates continue to actively cooperate with the Afghan Taliban in return for sanctuary and operating space. "By embedding itself within the Taliban movement, the Al-Qaida core also aims to maintain local bases of influence as a part of the wider Afghan insurgency and receives operational support from the Taliban for its regional affiliate, Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)," the report said. As per the committee AQIS comprises around 200 fighters, who operate as advisers and trainers of the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. Further, the Taliban, through the al-Qaida core, continues to wield substantial influence over regional al-Qaida affiliates. "Many al-Qaida-affiliated fighters from the Afghanistan- Pakistan border area have integrated into the Taliban, leading to a marked increase in the military capabilities of the movement," the report said, adding that currently more than 7,000 foreign terrorist fighters are fighting in Afghanistan for the Taliban and Al-Qaida affiliates. However, the report notes that under the order of the al-Qaida core, several of the group's second-tier leaders

had left South Asia for Syria "in line with the continued ambition of the al-Qaida core to play a more direct role in that ongoing conflict and use it to further its agenda". The report noted that in a video released in April this year, Al- Zawahiri tried to inject Al-Qaida ideology into the ongoing fight, with the aim of expanding its support base and rebuilding its regional network in the aftermath of a potential collapse of ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Comments. The Security Council Committee is supported by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities. It is currently comprised of eight experts based in New York and its current mandate was extended by Security Council until December 2019. The Monitoring Team assists two Security Council Committees: the ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and the 1988 Committee. Hafiz Saeed's Jamaat-ud- Dawa Launches Political Party. Jamaat-ud- Dawa, has entered politics by forming a new party. The new Milli Muslim League party will follow the ideology of Jamaat-ud- Dawa (JuD)."We have decided to make a new political party, so that Pakistan is to make a real Islamic and welfare state," said Milli Muslim League president Saifullah Khalid. As per the party spokesman, Hafeez Saeed, who missed the launch event as he remains under house arrest in Lahore, and other senior JuD figures are unlikely to be involved in the new party that will adhere to JuD's ideology. Comments. Western countries have for decades accused Pakistan of harbouring Islamist militant groups and using them as proxies to project power in the region. The new party was designed to give militants better cover amid pressure from the international community on Pakistan to crack down on LeT and JuD. The making of a party indicates the need of JuD to hide itself further so to avoid criticism. With election season, back on track in Pakistan due to the disqualification of Nawaz Sharif, the JuD is hoping for an entry into the parliament. Majlis-e- Amal (MMA), a six party alliance of religious groups that had once been backed by General Pervez Musharraf to be the government's choir had won a respectable 45 seats in National Assembly, taking more than 11 percent of the votes in 2002 elections. That was the highest ever for the religious right. This time, with voters having a ringside seat on the court dramas on corruption, the religious right may be scenting a better chance for themselves. Thus, the sudden entry of the JuD into the political stage.

BANGLADESH

Col Saikat Roy

8 Killed as Flood Situation Worsens in Bangladesh. Eight people were killed and five others went missing on August 13, as the overall flood situation has worsened in the country's

northwest and northeast regions. The water of the Teesta, Dharla, Someshwari, Atrai and Surma rivers were flowing above the danger level due to incessant rain for the last few days and onrush of water from the upstream. Meanwhile, over 2 lakh people were marooned by the floodwater as both the Teesta and Dharla were flowing above the red mark. The flood bypass on the Teesta Barrage broke down due to the opening of 54 gates of Gajoldoba arrage in India and the onrush of water coupled with heavy rain in the last five days. The floodwaters also disrupted road and rail communications with other parts of the country. At least 500 educational institutions were inundated by the water. Roads have also been submerged while several fisheries washed away by the floodwaters. Floodwater submerged 150 acres of paddy field in the union.

Indo-Bangla Relation: Harsh Vardhan Shringla. Most Bangladeshis preferring West Bengal as their destination while visiting India, the state has the most to gain from a better relation between the two countries, Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Harsh Vardhan Shringla said, at the ICC programme 'India-Bangladesh Business Relations: The Way Forward' on Saturday, August 12, 2017. 'The minimum amount required for carrying by a person from Bangladesh before we give Indian visas is 150 US dollars. Half a billion of people from that country come to India for recreation, for tourism, shopping, medical facilities and they all prefer West Bengal. So the tangible gains to the economy of West Bengal are incredible,' he said. In 2015 around 7.5 lakh visas had been issued, while last year it was 9.33 lakh. Referring to the requirement of power in Bangladesh, Shringla said that scope to meet part of that demand from the surplus that Bengal has is enormous. About connectivity, the diplomat stressed on the inland waterways and coastal shippings. 'We have already started transshipments in Indian waterways so in a certain sense we have already started sending goods through Bangladesh. We have also started using smaller vessels along the coast to transport goods from our different ports right into the interior parts of Bangladesh using the riverine system,' he said. Later talking to journalists, Shringla stressed for consultation to reach a consensus before taking a decision on the Teesta water issue. He said it required extensive consultation in India and amongst the two nations before an agreement could be inked. Settling maritime boundaries had restored lot of confidence and enabled both countries to set out their economic engagements to exploit the 'blue economy', he said. Talking about terrorists using Bangladesh soil, the diplomat said, 'Terrorism is an issue which is deflects both the countries. We are on the same wavelength on issues that involve radicalism, fundamentalism, terrorism. We cooperate closely in tackling these threats to our countries,' he added. India in Talks with Myanmar, Bangladesh to Deport 40,000 Rohingya. India is in talks with Bangladesh and Myanmar about its plan to deport around 40,000 Rohingya Muslims living in the country illegally, with state governments told to form task forces for the purpose. Tens of thousands of Rohingya have fled

persecution in Buddhist-majority Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh since the early 1990s, with some of them then crossing over a porous border into India. New Delhi says only around 14,000 of the Rohingya living in India are registered with the UN refugee agency, making the rest illegal and liable to be sent back. Junior Interior Minister Kiren Rijiju told parliament on Wednesday the federal government had directed state governments to “constitute task forces at district levels to identify and deport the illegally staying foreign nationals”.

Comments. More than 75,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh since Oct. 9 after an insurgent group called Harakah al-Yaqin attacked Myanmar border police posts, prompting a huge security crackdown in which troops have been accused of murder and rape of Rohingya civilians. Rohingya are generally reviled in India, where its 1.3 billion people are fighting for resources and job opportunities. Nationalist, anti-Islamic sentiments have also fuelled hatred towards them. The Rohingya in India live mainly in Jammu, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi in the north, Hyderabad in the south, and Rajasthan in the west.

Khaleda Zia Gets Permanent Bail in Graft Charges. The High Court on Wednesday, August 9, 2017, granted permanent bail to former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in a corruption case involving embezzlement of 21 million Bangladeshi Taka. Khaleda, accused in 37 cases, is now on bail in all the cases.

Comments. The graft case was filed in 2008. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) case accused Khaleda, her son Tarique Rahman and four others in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

16th Amendment Verdict ‘Undermines Bangabandhu’, says Attorney General. Attorney General Mahbubey Alam today said Bangabandhu has been undermined through the Supreme Court observation on 16 th amendment verdict. The SC in its 16 th amendment verdict observed, “No nation-no country is made of or by one person.” “Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been undermined through the Supreme Court observation and people of the country have been hurt by the observation,” the AG said.

Comments. The apex court on August 1, scrapped the 16th amendment to the constitution that had given parliament the power to remove SC judges for misconduct or incapacity.

First Batch of Indian Rice Arrives at Mongla. The first consignment of rice imported from India by the Bangladesh government arrived at the Mongla Port on August 9, 2017 in an attempt to stabilise the market of the prime staple. The ship, carrying 4700 metric tons of rice, anchored in the port, the rice supply will be sent to south-western district in lighter age vessels. A total of 50,000 tonnes of rice will come through Chittagong and Mongla ports.

SRI LANKA

Col Saikat Roy

Sri Lanka, India Foreign Ministers hold Bilateral Meeting at BIMSTEC Meeting in Kathmandu. India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on Friday, Aug 11, 2017, held a bilateral meeting with Vasantha Senanayake, State Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka on the sidelines of 15th Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Ministerial Meeting in Kathmandu. Both ministers exchanged views on mutual relations but have not discussed regional issues. They also shared views on making the initiation taken by BIMSTEC a success. Sri Lanka Foreign Minister Ravi Katunayake Resigns. Sri Lanka's Foreign Affairs Minister Ravi Katunayake resigned from his portfolio on, Aug 10, 2017 after allegations surfaced that he indirectly benefitted from the Central Bank Treasury Bond scam.

The Minister making a special statement in Parliament said that he took this decision to maintain the respect and the dignity of parliament and the government. Reiterating that he was not guilty of the charges levelled against him, Minister Karunanayake said some groups in order to avoid punishment for their wrong doings are attempting to disrupt the democratic process in the country and to topple the government to regain power. Sri Lanka Plans to Increase Investment on Exports to Relieve Debt Burden. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the newly modernized Highland Milk Powder Factory today, the Prime Minister said the debt burden can be relieved by increasing investment on exports. The Prime Minister said that the government hopes to increase investment and trade as well as plans to export more items. Earlier Sri Lanka was confined to three export commodities - tea, rubber and coconut. Thereafter the country began exporting apparel and solid rubber tires. Plans are underway to export 6000 products after regaining the GSP+ facility, the Premier said. He emphasized that Sri Lanka would be able to increase revenue by exporting 50-100 items in the short run. Measures will be launching to increase the investments, the Prime Minister added. Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe says the government is burdened with the payment of installments and interest of massive loans obtained by the previous regime.

AFGHANISTAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

Soldiers Killed as Taliban Storms Kandahar Base. At least 26 Afghan soldiers have been killed and 13 wounded in a Taliban attack on a military base in Kandahar province, according to the defence ministry, in the latest blow to struggling security forces. At least 21 other people went missing and seven were kidnapped as per the Afghan defence ministry spokesman. He said more than 80 fighters were killed in the counter attack. However, the Taliban claimed to have killed at

least 70 soldiers and to have seized a number of army vehicles, equipment, machinery and weapons. Comments. The Taliban has carried out increasingly complex attacks against security forces so far in 2017. According to US watchdog SIGAR, casualties among Afghan security forces soared by 35 percent in 2016, with 6,800 soldiers and police killed. Afghan troops and police are battling largely alone on the ground against anti- government forces, after US-led foreign forces withdrew from most combat operations in December 2014. The US is actively considering sending more troops to Afghanistan and US commanders there have requested thousands of extra soldiers on the ground. The US contingent now numbers about 8,400, and there are another 5,000 from NATO allies, a far cry from the US presence of more than 100,000 six years ago. They mainly serve as trainers and advisers.

NEPAL

Col Harpreet Singh

Nepal Launches Chinese Language Classes. Nepal and China have launched a programme to offer free training to up to 200 tourism entrepreneurs in Mandarin to attract more foreign visitors from China. Chinese ambassador to Nepal, Yu Hong inaugurated a new batch of tourism entrepreneurs who will be trained in the Chinese language in Kathmandu. A group of 40 people, consisting of tour operators and tourism entrepreneurs, will be trained during the six-month programme. The classes being run at the initiative of the Chinese embassy will not only help to promote Chinese tourists in Nepal, but it will also strengthen people-to- people relations between Nepal and China, Yu said. More than one billion Chinese tourists visited foreign countries between 2013-2016 and Nepal can tap the opportunity by training its tour operators in Chinese language, she said. Nepal could generate USD 22 billion every year if the country can attract one million Chinese tourists, she added. The classes will be provided at free of cost. Nepal currently attracts 125,000 Chinese tourists annually and the number has been increasing steadily. Nepal is the third-largest country after India and Sri Lanka to receive Chinese tourists. Comments. The effort to increase Chinese tourism to Nepal is another step in the gradual increase in Chinese influence over Nepal. India also must take steps to send adequate tourists to Nepal – offering LTC to government employees to travel to Nepal and other SAARC countries may be one step in this direction.

MYANMAR

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

India's North East region's Road Connectivity with Myanmar/ASEAN. A recent media report stated that PM Modi has allocated US\$256 million for upgrade of 1360km long India – Myanmar- Thailand trilateral highway under construction. The high way will connect Moreh in Manipur state with Mae Sot in Thailand via Mandalay in Myanmar. It is a priority project to enhance connectivity with the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. There is plan to extend the highway further to Vietnam in future. The road will boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN- India Free Trade area. The total proposed length once completed till Vietnam is 3200km and also would be known as East West Economic Corridor. Another important project is the Kaladan multi-modal project which will connect Mizoram with Sittwe Port on the western coast of Myanmar. This river-cum-road transport project is aimed at providing sea access to the landlocked Northeast Indian states through Myanmar. The project was conceived in 2008 after Bangladesh did not allow transit from west Bengal to North East region of country through its territory. Both projects are delayed inordinately. The cause for that is our bureaucratic apathy and Myanmar lethargy as well. This can be well illustrated with the Example of Kaladan project which was visualized in 2008 which was originally scheduled to be connected in 2014 later this was reviewed to 2017 (as stated in reply by the minister of state of foreign affairs) but, now further delays are expected as two dams are planned on two tributaries feeding to kaladan river. This may not leave the river non- navigable requiring some changes in the project. Besides, both projects would eventually benefit the populations of India and Myanmar, yet there has been instances of local objections/and some protests in Myanmar. Apart from connectivity for trade and commerce, the projects have strategic implications in presence of growing Chinese influence and its claims in the South China Sea through which nearly 50% of trade passes. Chinese economic engagements are with singular aim to tie the ASEAN states to its economy. It is building rail and road networks and laying energy pipelines etc to take advantage of ASEAN states geostrategic locations which also help China to reach the Indian Ocean and overcome its Malacca strait dilemma. India has now renewed diplomatic focus in this region. It has come at a time when the region is seeing increased geopolitical competition among major powers, including China, the US, India and Japan, as their interests overlap and intersect in this sub-region. Currently, Gov- of- India has initiated plans to bring in better road infrastructure in our own North East region without which it would not be possible to make use of the road network in Myanmar and beyond. We must therefore, deliver the promised connectivity infrastructure to tap the geostrategic advantage that goes with it. Delays in delivery will affect our credibility with our neighbours and prospects of better growth potential for our north eastern region

RUSSIA

Col Harpreet Singh

Russia's Biggest War Games in Europe Since Cold War. For a week in the middle of September, Russia will be running the biggest military exercise in Europe since the end of the cold war. The build-up is already under way. Zapad ("West") exercises take place every four years and date from Soviet times, when they were used to test new weapons and tactics. Zapad 2017 is expected to involve at least 100,000 Russian troops. It will extend across the country's Western Military District and Belarus, which has a border with three NATO members. By next week, most of the advance elements of the forces taking part in the exercise will have arrived. The rest, expected a fortnight later, will include the First Guards Tank Army, a famous unit from the Second World War that was reformed in 2015. It packs a mighty offensive punch. Earlier this year, as part of its response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and covert invasion of eastern Ukraine, NATO deployed four battalion-sized battle-groups to Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Essentially a tripwire consisting of only about 4,000 troops, these multinational units are meant to send a message to Moscow that if it tries anything against a NATO member in the east, it will quickly face the whole alliance. Last month an

American-led NATO exercise called Sabre Guardian saw 25,000 troops from more than 20 countries carrying out drills across Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. The idea was to practice territorial defence against a technologically sophisticated aggressor. Comments. This year's Zapad is the first to be held since Russia's aggression against Ukraine. It unfolds against the backdrop of a relationship with the West more tense and adversarial than at any time in 30 years. There are big differences between the way NATO conducts military exercises and the way Russia does. Zapad apart, since 2013 Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, has

ordered a series of no-notice "snap" exercises, often involving up to 50,000 troops and anti-Western scenarios. There is little doubt that Mr Putin sees these not just as a means of honing efficiency, but as a way to intimidate smaller neighbours and eventually draw them into a sphere of Russian influence. Four such drills took place in 2013. A fifth, which began in late February 2014 and deployed large numbers of airborne troops, armoured vehicles and attack helicopters, became the springboard for the occupation of Crimea. Even before he turned to snap drills, Mr Putin used an earlier exercise, Kavkaz 2008, to launch his invasion of Georgia. Military deception, or maskirovka, is an art at which Russia excels. Russia may be planning to use Zapad 2017 to bring soldiers and equipment near Belarus and leave them there. In particular, NATO is worried about the movement of longer-range missiles, surveillance drones and Special Forces into threatening positions under the pretext of the exercise. There are even fears, based on intelligence sources, that

Zapad 2017 could be used to insert forces into Belarus that would shore up Russian influence in the event that its dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, either moves closer to the West or is deposed by someone careless of Moscow's interests. Russia routinely flouts the Vienna Document, an accord designed to avert misunderstandings during war games. The accord is brokered through the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and fosters transparency. Any drill involving more than 9,000 troops requires advance notification of at least 42 days and any exercise involving more than 13,000 troops must be preceded by an invitation to the other 56 participating states to send two observers. Russia breaks both rules with its snap exercises, and the second with Zapad. As a cynical way of dodging its obligations, it often claims to be holding a series of different drills at slightly different times. Especially galling for NATO is the way Russia uses the Vienna Document to ensure it has its full complement of observers at its perceived enemy's big exercises. All NATO can do is remain vigilant and hope Mr Putin sends his troops back to barracks when Zapad is over. US Sanctions on Russia. The US Senate has approved further sanctions against Russia, Iran and North Korea, and now the bipartisan bill goes to President Donald Trump's desk, where it may be vetoed or signed into law. All three countries were accused of violating "the international order". The vote was 98 to 2. Leadership in the House and Senate agreed on the details of the sanctions bill, following the near unanimous vote in the House earlier, 419 to 3. The bill tightens existing sanctions around the ongoing situation in Ukraine and imposes new measures including some in response to alleged hacking during the 2016 election and others that target key Russian industries such as the railways, shipping, metals and mining. It would also bring in restrictions on companies doing business with the Russian oil industry. The sanctions target Russian gas and pipeline developments by codifying six of former President Barack Obama's executive orders implementing sanctions on Russia. The legislation would impose mandatory sanctions on transactions with the Russian defence and intelligence sectors, including the FSB and the GRU, the Russian military intelligence agency that was primarily responsible for Russia's attack on US election. It would impose mandatory visa bans and asset freezes on any individual that undermines the cyber security of public or private infrastructure and democratic institutions. Russia immediately threatened to retaliate against new sanctions passed by the US House of Representatives, saying they made it all but impossible to achieve the Trump administration's goal of improved relations. The measures push US-Russia ties into uncharted territory and "don't leave room for the normalisation of relations" in the foreseeable future, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said. Then on 29 July the Russians informed the US to reduce their diplomatic staff in Russia to 455, exactly the same

strength as Russian staff in the US. Comments. Members of the US Congress want to turn existing sanctions, and some new ones, into law. Both houses have Republican majorities. The new sanctions are a clear attempt by Congress to tie the hands of President Trump, who publicly said he wanted to improve relations with Russia. President Trump will either sign it into law or reject it with use of a veto. With enough votes, Congress could use its own veto to counter the president so it is pretty much a fait accompli for Trump. When the sanctions become a law, it means getting rid of sanctions will become much harder, and the power to reverse the sanctions effectively moves from the hands of the president to Congress. Previously, the sanctions were introduced as executive orders, which any president has the power to remove instantly. Under the proposed law, Congress must approve any request from the president to ease the financial penalties detailed in the bill. In order to waive individual sanctions, a president would need to submit a report to Congress outlining why it is in the national interest to take that action. The White House has indicated that it supports the sanctions legislation. A presidential veto would provoke "a major outcry" among politicians in Washington. What about US-Russia relations? The signal from US is that tough sanctions on Russia will stay until the situation in Ukraine was "fully resolved". Without a clear end in sight, that could mean a long time. Russia has so far given the president the benefit of the doubt when it comes to Mr Trump's promise to forge better relations between Washington and Moscow. However, these new sanctions may "test their faith" because they are in fact harsher than the sanctions under President Obama. We will probably see expulsions of some US diplomats from Moscow shortly as threatened by Russia. Some European countries are also unhappy with the planned sanctions. The law signals a departure from a joint EU-US approach to Russian sanctions. And some European countries have economic concerns because the new law could penalise European companies that invest in big Russian infrastructure projects such as the new Nord Stream II pipeline to transport gas between Russia and Germany. The German Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel, and Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern said this part of the new sanctions programme would add a new negative dimension to US-European relations and Europe's energy supplies were "a matter for Europe, not for the United States". The EU is contemplating taking up the issue at the next WTO conference.

Putin Signs Deal Allowing Russian Air Force to Stay in Syria for Almost Half a Century. Russian President Vladimir Putin has endorsed a bill ratifying a protocol to the 2015 agreement between Moscow and Damascus regulating the deployment of the Russian Air Force in Syria for 49 years. The protocol signed by Russia and Syria in

January 2017 regulates issues related to the deployment of the Russian Air Force on Syrian territory as well as related to Russia's exercise of jurisdiction over its military movable and immovable assets on Syrian territory. It also covers the measures needed to maintain the operation efficiency of the Russia Air Force. Under the protocol, the Russian Air Force are allowed to stay on Syrian territory for 49 years with an option of automatically extending that arrangement for 25-year periods after this term expires. The document, published on the Russian official legal information website, particularly says that the Syrian government is handing over a plot of land in the Latakia province, where the Khmeimim Air Base is located, over to Russia for its free use. It was adopted by the Russian State Duma, the Lower House of the Russian Parliament, on July 14 and approved by the Senate five days later. Comments. The Russian Air Force was deployed to Syria on September 30, 2015 at the request of the Syrian government as part of the operation aimed at fighting terrorist groups. The group was stationed at the Khmeimim Air Base. At that time, Russia said it would keep a military presence at the port of Tartus and at the Khmeimim airbase to monitor the situation in the region and observe the implementation of ceasefire agreements. However, Russia now has a significant, direct military intervention in Syria including a joint air-ground expeditionary force in Latakia and Tartus provinces along the north-western coast, far surpassing the scope of its longstanding advisory and arms-supply role. Moreover, with the Russian Air Force being stationed in Syria almost permanently, the Russian presence becomes established and it will be increasingly difficult to remove. As in Crimea and Ukraine, the United States -- much less any other country -- seems unlikely to challenge Russian forces militarily. More broadly, Russia appears committed to exercising its influence in the Middle East, and Syria provided an opportunity which it grabbed with both hands. Like Hezbollah's open entry into the war in 2013, the treaty is a potential military game-changer, bolstering the Syrian regime's staying power, and restricting the ability of Israeli and U.S. air forces to operate there. Moscow seems willing to take some risk to pursue its goal of regime survival and to score one on Washington. And as long as the Kremlin continues to support him, the idea that Assad will leave power recedes even more.

UNITED STATES

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

US Options in Tackling Nuclear North Korea. US military strategists have contemplated a military action which according to the Defence Secretary will be multilateral one involving number of the regional powers in the Pacific. The American President too have talked of

muscular response in his exclamation of “fire and fury” if North Korea carries out threatened missile attack in sea facing Guam. It is not possible for even America to locate and destroy all missile and nuclear sites of North Korea. It also comes with attendant risk of sure nuclear response. Hence, it can be ruled out. Another view is to target the North Korean leader. This again is not an easy option. US presently succeed in targeting terrorists in countries with concurrence of local govt leaders or where state has no capacity to respond. This therefore, is extremely difficult option to execute besides, like the former option it may entail response. US has been persuading China to strictly implement UN sanctions which indeed are very stringent but, despite China willingness to fully support the sanctions, it may not do so as was the case in the past especially as China sees North Korea as its strategic tool against America and its allies. Even if China was to fully support the sanctions (News emanating from China news papers hint that China has given strict instructions to stop trade with North Korea), still the grapevine is that North Korean will not even listen to China. In the final analysis, it is evident with a nuclear state, the threats of military action will not work similarly; sanctions too will have little effect as have seen in North Korean case. The best action is to engage diplomatically. It is high time that US discusses directly with North Korea. This will help in containing the threat if not eliminating the nuclear threat all together. In long run, It seems US will have to accept North Korea with nuclear weapons. Its case is different from Iran which still had to develop a nuclear weapon whereas, North Korea has already developed the nuclear weapon. As this piece is being written already the media news breakout are hinting at US climb down from the rhetoric of military action and with suggestion of engagement of North Korea.