Strategic Digest

Britain Raises Cyber War Regiment

Russia Releases Nuclear Deterrence Policy

Surge in Iranian Naval Offensive Capability

Southeast Asian Countries Reject China's SCS Claims

Hong Kong Protests and China's New National Security Law

New UN Security Council Mission in Sudan

Britain Raises Cyber War Regiment

Based on the outcome of the Strategic Defence and Security Review of 2015, the British Army is reorganising itself from a force that had almost exclusively concentrated on counter-insurgency and stabilisation missions since the end of the Cold War to one that is also capable of carrying out sophisticated conventional operations in the coming decades. Known as Army 2020 Refine, the reorganisation involves restructuring the Army from a force that was structured around independent brigades to one organised into divisions composed of three brigades and complemented by specialist units such as an air assault brigade and infantry battalions for assisting "indigenous" forces.

As part of this reorganisation, the British Army has raised the first dedicated cyber regiment – the 13th Signals Regiment. A unit of 1 Signal Brigade of the 6th UK Division, the cyber regiment comprises of some 250 specialists who will form the core of a new Army Cyber Information Security Operations Centre and in addition render other cyber and information warfare support functions.

The 6th Division, comprising of two Signals Brigades, one Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) brigade, one infantry brigade for stabilisation missions, and a specialised infantry group, is a formidable force capable of performing a variety of tasks and roles across the world. Its real punch lies in its information warfare

Source: dailymail.co.uk

capabilities, which are defined by its ability to conduct Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), Electronic Warfare (EW) and defensive and offensive Cyber Operations. Thus, the ISR brigade has seven battalions for intelligence gathering, situational awareness, imagery interpretation and analysis, three Artillery Surveillance and Target Acquisition (SATA) units, two EW units, two Special Forces units, a Land Intel Fusion Centre, and a Defence Cultural Specialised Unit. 6 UK Division's infantry brigade is reportedly a full-fledged Electronics and PSYOPS force that works closely with British Intelligence and Special Air Service.

Three highlights of the UK model of cyberspace defence are relevant. One, a single agency should be vested with responsibility for cyberspace defence (GCHQ – Government Communications Head Quarters – in UK). Two, resources should be optimised by making one formation responsible for fielding the communication network and all other EW and cyber tasks (Corps of Signals in the British Army). Finally, the convergence of operational information war field formations and units in a single division (the 6th UK Division) provides strategic capabilities.

Russia Releases Nuclear Deterrence Policy

On 2 June, President Vladimir Putin signed into law a nuclear strategy document titled "Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Nuclear Deterrence". This is the first time that Russia has officially released its nuclear policy. The policy is in sync with the 2014 Russian military doctrine and highlights the scenarios that warrant the deployment of nuclear weapons.

Emphasising its "defensive" nature, the policy states that nuclear weapons are a means to maintain credible deterrence against potential adversaries. According to the document, the key "dangers" that have the potential to translate into "threats", thus warranting "nuclear deterrence" are: military build-ups in Russia's immediate neighbourhood; deployment of missile defence systems, cruise and ballistic missiles, and nuclear weapons and delivery systems in non-nuclear states; and, high-precision non-nuclear and hypersonic weapons, unmanned combat aerial vehicles, and directed energy weapons.

RS-24 Yars (SS-27 Mod 2) ICBM.
Source: sipri.org

The new policy emphasises Russia's "right to determine" the use of nuclear weapons not only against nuclear threats but also against conventional threats if the latter either prove to be existential in nature or an adversary's actions undermine Russian nuclear retaliation capabilities. Another trigger for Russian nuclear retaliation would be the "receipt of reliable information about the launch of ballistic missiles targeting Russia or its allies".

The salience of nuclear weapons in Russian policy has increased during the last 30 years because Russia's conventional military capabilities have not kept pace with those of rival NATO countries. Against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing confrontation with the West, the new policy not only lays down the country's nuclear outlook but also signals the Kremlin's intention to raise the stakes if push comes to shove.

Surge in Iran's Naval Offensive Capability

On 28 May 2020, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) took delivery of 112 fast attack craft and missile boats. These new generation Ashura, Miad, Haidar and Zulfiqar class fast attack craft and their weapon guidance systems are reported to have been indigenously designed, developed and manufactured by experts in Iran's Ministry of Defence. Further, more than 80 per cent of the equipment in these vessels including telecommunication devices, radars and control and monitoring systems were manufactured domestically.

According to the 2019 US defence intelligence report on Iran's military power, Ashura class boats are Fast Inshore Attack Craft equipped with guns and rockets, and

Zulfiqar class vessels are modified Peykaap III missile boats that are expected to be equipped with Nasr anti-ship cruise missiles (a variant of the Chinese C-704 missile with a range of 35 km). As of now, the specifications of the Miad and Haidar class vessels are not known.

Source: ifpnews.com

The IRGCN's primary task is the protection of the Iranian littoral. It employs an asymmetric doctrine that emphasises speed, mobility, large numbers, surprise, and survivability, and takes advantage of Iran's geography as well as the shallow and confined waterways of the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. Instead of acquiring larger ships as a more traditional navy might, the IRGCN has pursued smaller and faster vessels armed with a variety of weapon systems. The IRGCN appears to prefer the tactic of 'swarming' – attacks on an enemy naval force by large numbers of inshore attack craft that converge on their targets from ambushing positions on the Iranian coast or offshore islands.

With the addition of 112 vessels, the IRGC Navy's strength has doubled, thus significantly enhancing its offensive capability and providing it greater operational flexibility in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

Southeast Asian Countries Reject China's SCS Claims

Indonesia has added its weight to diplomatic moves by its ASEAN partners rejecting China's expansive claims to the South China Sea (SCS). In a Note Verbale to the United Nations Secretary General, Indonesia's Permanent Mission to the United Nations declared that the 9-dash line lacks "international legal basis" and that it is not bound by such claims that are in contravention of international law including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Indonesian letter also endorsed the 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague on the issue which was brought before it by the Philippines. Indonesia is not a claimant in the SCS dispute. Yet, tensions have begun to flare between Indonesia and China, most recently in January 2020, over the presence of Chinese fishing vessels backed by Chinese Coast Guard ships near Indonesia's Natuna Islands.

Indonesia's is the latest in a flurry of submissions filed by ASEAN countries in recent months on the issue of Chinese claims to the SCS. In December 2019, Malaysia made a submission claiming sovereignty over an extended continental shelf off its northern coast. When China responded by reasserting its "historic rights" to the waters of the SCS, the Philippines and Vietnam submitted separate notes protesting against China's territorial and maritime claims. In its submission, the Philippines termed China's position as inconsistent with international law, highlighted the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling that claims exceeding those permitted by UNCLOS are not legally valid, and asserted its own claims on the Kalayaan Island Group and the Scarborough Shoal. For its part, Vietnam described the Chinese claims as serious violations of its own sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly island groups, and affirmed that UNCLOS is the "sole legal basis" for determining maritime entitlements.

Hong Kong Protests and China's New National Security Law

In the last week of May 2020, China's National People's Congress (NPC) approved the government's decision to promulgate a law for putting in place "mechanisms for the preservation of national security' in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). The proposed security law is aimed at preventing secession, subversion and terrorism, and curbing hostile foreign forces. It is expected to authorise Beijing's intelligence and security presence in Hong Kong.

The full details for implementing the law are not yet available. Besides, there is no clarity either about its constitutionality in light of The Hong Kong Basic Law that governs HKSAR or the nature of relations between the to be established Chinese security agencies and Hong Kong's own security enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, the proposed law has been widely viewed as compromising the autonomous status of Hong Kong enshrined in the Basic Law. It has created a furore in the United States and some European countries. On 29 May, President Trump initiated "the process of revoking Hong Kong's special status under US law," which was contingent upon certification of Hong Kong's autonomous status by the US Secretary of State.

Hong Kong seems to be emerging as a geopolitical thorn between the US and its allies on one hand and China on the other. Meanwhile, Zhang Xiaoming, deputy director of China's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, recently remarked that "the degree of
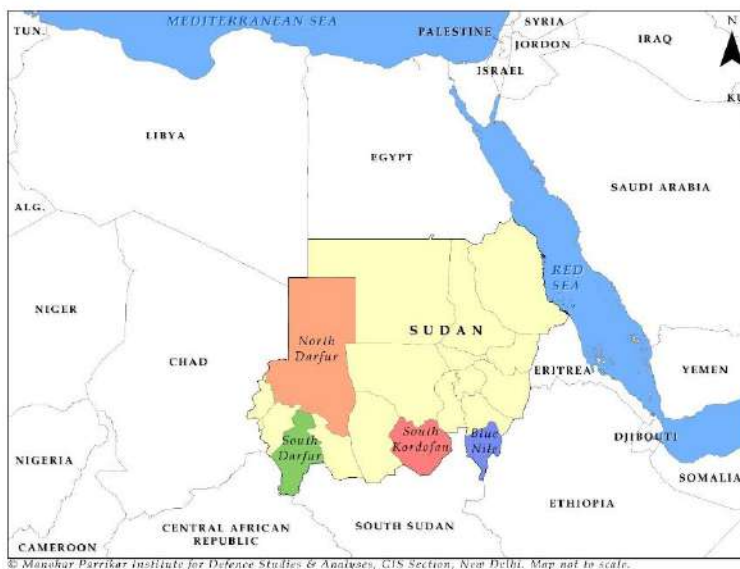
autonomy that Hong Kong would have when the post-colonial agreement on its status runs out in 2047 could depend on how the protest-hit city behaves until then."

Thus, one year after the outbreak of months-long mass agitation in Hong Kong against the proposed, but later shelved, extradition law to establish an extradition system with China, the future of the territory's freedom and autonomy has become more tenuous and bleaker.

New UN Security Council Mission in Sudan

On 4 June, the United Nations Security Council voted to establish a new political mission in Sudan. Adopting resolution 2524 (2020), the Council decided that the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) will assist the war-torn Northeastern African country in its transition to democratic governance.

Sudan has been in the midst of a political crisis since pro-democracy protests ousted President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. The new UN mission is initially mandated for 12 months and aims to provide support for peace negotiations and technical assistance to the constitution drafting process. As part of the mission, the Security Council will deploy mobile ceasefire monitoring teams and facilitate local crisis mediation with particular focus on Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan. UNITAMS will also mobilise global support for economic and development assistance, and enable swift and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid.

© Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, CIS Section, New Delhi. Map not to scale.

In the meeting, the Security Council also decided to extend the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) until 31 December 2020. Resolution 2525 (2020) stated that the Council will decide the course of action regarding UNAMID's exit from Sudan by the end of this year and will coordinate with the newly formed UNITAMS to define the modalities and timeline for the transition of responsibility.

In March, a draft resolution introduced in the Council had recommended terminating the 13-year old UN-AU mission and transferring its mandate, particularly the protection of civilians, to the interim government of Sudan. UNAMID was established in July 2007 through the adoption of resolution 1769 amidst a humanitarian crisis in Darfur. UNAMID was the world's largest peacekeeping force with a sanctioned strength of 28,000 troops, and also the first UN joint force with the AU.