

# THE WEEK IN REVIEW

March 14 – March 20, 3 (3), 2016

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# I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

## A. South Asia

### Afghanistan

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Dissent group says no to talks; HIA begins peace talks with HPC; New Year to be tough for militants; Afghans need to know about closed-door discussions on peace process.**

The dissident Taliban leader Mullah Rasool has said he will not participate in peace talks with the government which is led by the Taliban supreme leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor. In an interview with the UK-based Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Mullah Rasool has said he is not opposed to reconciliation in principle, insisting that he opposes with Mansoor's hegemony over the process as far as the Taliban are concerned. "Earlier we were thinking that the Afghan Government wanted peace talks with all Taliban, but when we saw that it is interested only in making peace with Mullah Mansur because of the dictates of the Pakistani Government, we decided we cannot start peace talks with the Afghan Government," Rasool added. Rasool further added that he will not sit in the same reconciliation meetings with Mansoor, whose claim to leadership he considers spurious, nor will he start a separate reconciliation track. He said he will negotiate only when Mansoor abandons plans for reconciliation or is excluded from them. Meanwhile, Rasool favoured the inclusion of neighbouring Iran in the Afghan reconciliation process, saying the quadrilateral approach (involving US, Chinese, Pakistani and Afghan diplomats working together to re-launch negotiations with the Taliban) does not sufficiently represent the variety of regional interests.<sup>1</sup>

A delegation of the Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) militant group, led by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, formally entered negotiations over the peace process with the High Peace Council (HPC) in Kabul. HPC public relations director Abdur Rahman Hamid told Pajhwok Afghan News the two-member HIA delegation led by Eng. Karim Amin arrived to Kabul on March 16 and officially started peace talks with Syed Ahmad Gilani, the HPC chairman. Other members of the HIA delegation included Atiqullah Safai. After their meeting with Gilani, the HIA delegation head Eng. Karim Amin and HPC secretary Ayub Rafiqi briefly appeared at a joint press conference, but they avoided questions from reporters. The delegation met Gilani, his deputy Karim Khalili and other members of the HPC, Rafiqi said, adding the meeting raised hopes for further achievements of the HPC. Amin said they decided to join the peace process after being requested by the Afghan government and the HPC. He said they had come to Kabul with three demands including the restoration of Afghanistan's national sovereignty, the establishment of a legitimate Islamic system and ensuring political, social and economic justice. He insisted on inter-Afghan dialogue for the resolution to the Afghan conflict.<sup>2</sup>

National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar has hoped that the shrinking economy of the country will have a growth in the coming new Afghan year. In his message on the occasion of Nowruz, the start of the new Afghan year, Atmar said the coming year will be a tough one for the anti-government armed militants. Calling the start of the New Year a 'Busy Year' for the Afghan

<sup>1</sup> "Mullah Rasool Says will not Participate in Peace Talks Led by Mullah Akhtar Mansoor", *Khaama Press*, March 17, 2016, at <http://www.khaama.com/mullah-rasool-says-will-not-participate-in-peace-talks-led-by-mullah-akhtar-mansoor-0370>

<sup>2</sup> "Gulbuddin-led HIA Begins Peace Talks with HPC", *Pajhwok*, March 17, 2016, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/03/17/gulbuddin-led-hia-begins-peace-talks-hpc>

government, Atmar said the Afghan security forces will continue to suppress and eliminate the roots of terrorist groups. He pointed towards the International Monetary Fund (IMF) report regarding the economy of the country in 2015 in better shape as compared to 2014 and said there are expectations that the new Hijri year will bring more economic growth in the country. Atmar further added that the year 1394 was a challenging year for the Afghan government, describing it a year of survival and tests. He said the Afghan security institutions maintained coordination during the year in a better way which was never maintained in the past and Afghanistan's allies remained committed to support the Afghan government.<sup>3</sup>

The acting provincial governor of northern Balkh province Ata Mohammad Noor has called on the government of national unity to update the Afghan people regarding the behind the scenes discussions on Afghan peace process. In his opening remarks during a ceremony to mark Nowruz, start of the new Solar year, Noor said the Afghan people want peace and stability in the country, noting the growing violence during the recent years. However, Noor said the Afghan people must become aware regarding the peace deals and closed-door discussions on reconciliation efforts. "The Afghan people need to know what is going behind the scenes, people need to know about the potential deals with the militant groups and they need to be aware that the deals are not against the national interests of the country," Noor said.<sup>4</sup>

## Pakistan

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Pakistan, Turkmenistan ink Sign accords; Leaders vow to step up anti-terror fight.**

Pakistan and Turkmenistan on March 16 inked eight accords on cooperation, including a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on financial intelligence to curb money laundering and terrorism financing. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov witnessed the signing ceremony at the PM House as the respective sides inked the documents and also signed the Joint Communique. The two sides also said the threat of extremism and terrorism need to be countered collectively to ensure peace and stability in the region. After holding a round of delegation-level talks, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Berdimuhamedov told the media persons that the two countries share similar views on important issues. Nawaz said Pakistan shares the concern that terrorism and extremism were the root cause of insecurity and instability in the region. "This menace also undermines our endeavours for socio-economic development. We have to work collectively to eradicate the scourge of terrorism and extremism," he told the reporters at a joint press stake out. The Turkmen president arrived in the country on a two-day visit on the invitation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.<sup>5</sup>

While reiterating the resolve to weed out terrorism, the political and military leadership of the country on March 18 agreed on stepping up operation against terrorists and their facilitators. A meeting was held on the law order situation in the country under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to review in detail overall internal and external security situation, operation

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<sup>3</sup> "Atmar: New Year To Be Tough For Militants, Better for Economic Growth", *Khaama Press*, March 19, 2016, at <http://www.khaama.com/atmar-new-year-to-be-tough-for-militants-better-for-economic-growth-0384>

<sup>4</sup> "Noor: Afghans Need To Know About Closed-Door Discussions On Peace Process", *Khaama Press*, March 20, 2016, at <http://www.khaama.com/noor-afghans-need-to-know-about-closed-door-discussions-on-peace-process-0392>

<sup>5</sup> "Pakistan, Turkmenistan Ink Eight Accords of Cooperation", *Daily Times*, March 17, 2016, at <http://dailytimes.com.pk/e-paper/2016-03-17/lahore/2770/5479>

Zarb-e-Azb, targeted operation in Karachi and ongoing operations against the terrorists across the country. The meeting was attended by army chief General Raheel Sharif, Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Special Assistant to PM Tariq Fatimi, ISI Director General (DG) Lt Gen Rizwan Akhtar and other senior officers. The participants of the meeting expressed satisfaction over the outcome of operation Zarb-e-Azb, Karachi operation and ongoing operation against the terrorists and their facilitators all over the country. The political and military leadership denounced in strong terms the attack on government employees' bus in Peshawar. The leadership said that no leniency would be shown to the terrorists and their facilitators and the country would be turned into a "cradle of peace" at every cost. Addressing the meeting, PM Nawaz Sharif said operation Zarb-e-Azb is yielding positive results. Infrastructure of the terrorists has been dismantled and their network has been destroyed due to the operation.<sup>6</sup>

## Bangladesh

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **SAARC countries must work jointly for regional stability: Foreign Minister; India flags off 2,200 tonnes of diesel to Bangladesh; President, PM congratulate new Myanmar president.**

Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali on March 17 urged the SAARC member states to focus on more realistic, result-oriented and mutually beneficial partnership for transforming the region into a development powerhouse through joint efforts. "We must work together in an atmosphere of friendship, peace and stability to continue to remain a secure, stable and prosperous region," he said while addressing the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the SAARC Council of Ministers (COM) held in Pokhara, Nepal. The meeting of SAARC COM was preceded by the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the SAARC standing committee and the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the SAARC programming committee, as part of the SAARC inter-summit sessions. Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque led the Bangladesh delegation at the standing committee. Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan on the side-lines of the Inter-Summit Sessions.<sup>7</sup>

Dharmendra Pradhan, minister (independent charge) for petroleum and natural gas of India, flags off a train carrying 2,200 tonnes of gas oil to Bangladesh from Siliguri, West Bengal on March 17, 2016. Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) of India, a subsidiary of state-run Bharat Petroleum Corporation, is supplying the gas oil. Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) will pay a premium of \$7 per barrel to Bharat Petroleum, whereas it pays \$4.5 to international suppliers, according to Mosleh Uddin, director of operations and planning at the BPC. From this consideration, the price will be higher. But international suppliers are only liable to bring the petroleum products up to Chittagong Port, leaving the BPC to bear transport costs to distribute it to different parts of the country. That overall transport cost will go down if a significant amount of diesel could be supplied from Parbatipur, said Mosleh Uddin.<sup>8</sup>

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina extended their congratulations to newly elected President of Myanmar Htin Kyaw on March 16. In a message, president hoped that the

<sup>6</sup> "Civil, Military Leaders Vow To Step Up Anti-Terror Fight", *Daily Times*, March 19, 2016, at <http://dailytimes.com.pk/e-paper/2016-03-19/lahore/2811/5523>

<sup>7</sup> "Saarc Countries Must Work Jointly for Regional Stability: FM", *The Daily Star*, March 19, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/saarc-countries-must-work-jointly-regional-stability-fm-1196308>.

<sup>8</sup> "India Flags off 2,200 Tonnes of Diesel to Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, March 18, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/india-flags-2200-tonnes-diesel-bangladesh-1043575>.

election will pave the way for a greater peace in Myanmar and joint efforts of both the countries would help make this region a better place. In her separate message, prime minister expressed hope that under the leadership of Htin Kyaw, Myanmar would undertake bold initiatives to infuse a greater trust and understanding between Bangladesh and Myanmar.<sup>9</sup>

## Sri Lanka

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **People's movement against Port City Project to launch fresh campaign; Sri Lanka to sign Paris Agreement to minimize global warming; India awards contract to establish Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Auditorium in Ruhuna University; Sri Lanka encourages Australia to promote human rights of migrants; Foreign Minister Samaraweera participates at the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers; Pakistan and Sri Lanka agree to boost defence ties; Thirteen Sri Lankan refugees return from Tamil Nadu.**

Following Sri Lankan government's decision to resume the China-funded Colombo Port City Project, a people's movement opposing the project has vowed to launch a fresh campaign against its resumption. The People's Movement against the Port City has demanded Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to immediately halt the project on the grounds that it is detrimental to the country's environment. The Sri Lankan government received the go-ahead from the Cabinet to resume the Port City Project after a comprehensive environmental impact assessment. However, the People's Movement against the Port City says coastal environment will be severely affected as a result of the construction activities of the Port City project.<sup>10</sup>

Sri Lanka's Cabinet of Ministers has approved a proposal made by President Maithripala Sirisena in his capacity as the Minister of Mahaweli Development and Environment to sign the Paris Agreement on Climate Change to minimise the emission of greenhouse gases and to formulate laws to establish a commission relating to climate change (Climate Change Commission of Sri Lanka).<sup>11</sup>

As part of its development partnership with Sri Lanka in the field of higher education, the Government of India is undertaking a project to set up the Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Auditorium in the University of Ruhuna, Matara at a cost of SLRs. 265 million. Following a process of competitive bidding, a contract to construct the building complex was signed on March 17, 2016 with M/s. Link Engineering (Pvt.) Ltd in the presence of High Commissioner of India Y.K. Sinha, State Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education D.G.M.V. Hapuarachchi, Vice-Chancellor of University of Ruhuna Prof. Gamini Senanayake, Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr. A. M. N. Alagiyawanna, Assistant Director, Department of External Resources T. M. Rihan, and other Government officials.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "President, PM Congratulate New Myanmar President", *The Daily Star*, March 17, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/president-pm-congratulate-new-myanmar-president-792271>.

<sup>10</sup> "People's Movement against Port City Project to Launch Fresh Campaign", *ColomboPage*, March 20, 2016, at [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_16A/Mar20\\_1458452806CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar20_1458452806CH.php).

<sup>11</sup> "Sri Lanka to Sign Paris Agreement to Minimize Global Warming", *ColomboPage*, March 18, 2016, at [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_16A/Mar18\\_1458308475CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar18_1458308475CH.php).

<sup>12</sup> "India Awards Contract To Establish Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Auditorium in Ruhuna University", *ColomboPage*, March 18, 2016, at [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_16A/Mar18\\_1458304580CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar18_1458304580CH.php).



Recommending the adoption of Australia's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) outcome at the United Nations Human Right Council (UNHRC) in Geneva on March 17, Sri Lanka urged Australia to protect the human rights of migrants in accordance with its international commitments.<sup>13</sup>

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera participated at the thirty- seventh Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers meeting in Pokhara, Nepal on March 17, 2016.<sup>14</sup>

Pakistan and Sri Lanka on decided to enhance defence cooperation, the Ministry of Defence Production in Pakistan said. The understanding was reached when the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in Pakistan, Maj. Gen (Retd) Jayanath Lokuketagodage met the Federal Minister of Defence Production (MoDP) Rana Tanveer Hussain on March 15, 2016. They exchanged views on matters of mutual interest and enhancing cooperation in defence production. Rana Tanveer Hussain also tried to resolve the issue of financial constraint on part of Sri Lanka, which is hindering Sri Lanka to buy heavy products from Pakistan. He gave two solutions, usage of unspent credit line or some organizations may provide finance to Sri Lanka on soft terms.<sup>15</sup>

A total of 13 Sri Lankan refugees, who were living in various camps across the State in Tamil Nadu, left for Colombo yesterday, under the voluntary repatriation programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>16</sup>

## Maldives

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Abu Dhabi Fund to loan US\$ 40 million for airport development; MDP rejects invitation to talks for fifth time; 52<sup>nd</sup> SAARC Programming Committee meeting begins; Saudis to provide US\$ 50 million to build flats for military, police officers.**

Finance Ministry has said that Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD) had agreed to loan US\$ 40 million for development of Ibrahim Nasir International Airport. Finance Ministry released a statement saying that the commitment was provided by ADFD during the discussions held by senior officials from ADFD and Finance Minister Abdulla Jihad on March 14, during his visit to Saudi Arabia. Jihad met with Director-General of ADFD, Mohammed Saif Al Suwaidi during his visit to Saudi Arabia. In addition to ADFD, Jihad also met with senior officials from Islamic Development Bank (IDB), who, according to Finance Ministry, provided assurances that they would push to increase the previously agreed upon loan amount for airport development project from US\$ 77 million to US\$ 110 million.<sup>17</sup>

The Government of Maldives expressed continued disappointment over the Maldivian Democratic Party's rejection to attend one-to-one talks. On March 14, the Party rejected the Government's invitation to enter into open discussions for the fifth time – the initial invitations were made to all

<sup>13</sup> "Sri Lanka Encourages Australia to Promote Human Rights of Migrants", *ColomboPage*, March 18, 2016, at [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_16A/Mar18\\_1458280716CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar18_1458280716CH.php).

<sup>14</sup> "Sri Lanka Says Engagement with SAARC Remains High Priority", *Colombo Gazette*, March 17, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/17/sri-lanka-says-engagement-with-saarc-remains-high-priority/>.

<sup>15</sup> "Pakistan and Sri Lanka Agree To Boost Defence Ties", *Colombo Gazette*, March 15, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/15/pakistan-and-sri-lanka-agree-to-boost-defence-ties/>.

<sup>16</sup> "Thirteen Sri Lankan Refugees Return from Tamil Nadu", *Colombo Gazette*, March 16, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/16/thirteen-sri-lankan-refugees-return-from-tamil-nadu/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Abu Dhabi Fund to loan USD 40 Mn for Airport Development", *SunOnline*, March 17, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36758>.

parties while the last three invitations were made to MDP alone so as to facilitate the Party's involvement in the talks in order to ensure the clear and vocal representation, and contribution, of the principal opposition within the proceedings. Dr. Mohamed Shainee, the Minister for Fisheries and Agriculture, who has been tasked with leading the Government representatives at the talks, expressed his deep disappointment at the turn of events.<sup>18</sup>

The 52<sup>nd</sup> South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Programming Committee began in Nepal on March 15, 2016. The meeting is being held at Pokhara, Nepal. Maldivian delegation that is participating in the Joint Committee meeting was led by Joint Secretary for Foreign Ministry, Farzana Fahir.<sup>19</sup>

Saudi Arabian government has made the decision to provide Maldives with US\$ 50 million in non-reimbursable aid to build flats for Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF) and Maldives Police Service officers. The decision was made during Maldivian Defense Minister Adam Shareef Umar's visit to Saudi Arabia to attend the ceremony held to mark the end of the first military exercise – Exercise North Thunder – by the coalition force set up under the initiation of Saudi Arabian government to fight against terrorism. Minister Shareef, during his visit to Saudi Arabia from March 10 to 13, met with Saudi King - Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Saudi Defence Minister - Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud, and leaders from other Islamic countries.<sup>20</sup>

## B. East Asia

### China

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **China calls for stronger structural reforms in the 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan; China resumes diplomatic relations with Gambia; China releases extra water to tackle the Southeast Asian drought; China to continue its anti-graft campaign.**

According to the Vice Premier, Zhang Gaoli, "China will step up supply-side reform in its 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan Period". He said this at the opening of the China Development Forum in Beijing on March 20. He also asserted on the need to improve people's livelihood and also to cut overcapacity and improve the existing weak links.<sup>21</sup>

The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his counterpart from Gambia, Neneh Macdouall-Gaye, on March 17, 2016, restoring diplomatic ties. Gambia had cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 2013. Both sides signed a joint statement. During the meeting Wang said that, "For more than two years, Gambia has demonstrated sincerity and determination and has made the right choice on this matter".<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "MDP Rejects Invitation to Talks for Fifth Time", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, March 14, 2016, at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=16549>.

<sup>19</sup> "52<sup>nd</sup> SAARC Programming Committee Meeting Begins", *SunOnline*, March 16, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36732>.

<sup>20</sup> "Saudis To Provide USD 50 Mn To Build Flats For Military, Police Officers", *SunOnline*, March 14, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36687>.

<sup>21</sup> "Chinese Vice Premier Urges Stronger Structural Reform", *China Daily*, March 20, 2016 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/20/content\\_23977172.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/20/content_23977172.htm), accessed on March 21, 2016

<sup>22</sup> "Relations Resumed with Gambia", By Li Xiaokun, *China Daily*, March 18, 2016 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/18/content\\_23929734.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/18/content_23929734.htm), accessed on March 21, 2016



As per the Chinese Minister of Water Resources, Chen Lei, Chinese Southwest hydropower station has increased water discharges to up to 2,190 cubic meters per second on a trans-boundary river. This is done in order to supply emergency water to drought hits regions of Southeast Asia.<sup>23</sup>

According to the Chinese Supreme People's Procuratorate, "China will continue to expose and punish corrupt senior government and Party officials". As per Cao Jianming, prosecutor-general, "This year, prosecutors will pay extra attention to officials who hinder the implementation of national economic development policies, block reform measures, or endanger government investment or the safety of State-owned assets".<sup>24</sup>

## Japan

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Japanese submarine to visit Subic Bay in Philippines; Japan prohibit 22 persons from re-entering Japan following North Korea's latest nuclear and ballistic missile tests; SDF's enhanced role in operations planning is aimed at uniting officers and bureaucrats.**

Japanese authorities have confirmed that a maritime self-defence force submarine Oyashio will visit Subic Bay in Philippines. This will be for the first time in more than a decade. Meanwhile, the two vessels, the Ariake and the Setogiri, accompanying the submarine will sail to Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam for a port call and training exercises. Reports suggest that some 500 personnel, together with 55 officer candidates, will take part in the exercises.<sup>25</sup>

Reports indicate that sanctions over North Korea's latest nuclear and ballistic missile tests made Japan prohibit 22 persons from re-entering Japan after visiting Pyongyang. Last month Japan banned the re-entry of high-ranking bureaucrats of a pro-Pyongyang group General Association of Korean Residents and of Korean engineers residing in Japan who are allegedly connected with the nuclear and missile development. Chairman of Chongryon, Ho Jong Man is also under these sanctions. Earlier in 2006, Japan barred about eight individuals, including senior Chongryon representatives, from re-entering Japan after the missile launch.<sup>26</sup>

Japanese defence minister Gen Nakatani argued that a larger role for SDF officers in preparing the next general operation strategy for troops, will deliver a boost to the stressed liaison between the officials and non-combatant administrators in the defence ministry. Nakatani stressed that it is vital that drafting of strategies and policy choices are prepared appropriately as Japan improve the harmony between the civil bureaucrats and SDF officers. There is a policy to partially transfer power from civilian administrators to uniformed SDF staffs in preparing general operation plans since the high-ranking SDF officers demanded a greater role in their formulation. Gen Nakatani stressed that

<sup>23</sup> "China Releases Water from Dam to Alleviate SE Asia Drought", By Cao Yin and Ma Danning, *China Daily*, March 16, 2016 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/16/content\\_23891709.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/16/content_23891709.htm), accessed on March 21, 2016

<sup>24</sup> "For Nation's Anti-Graft Campaign, No Slowdown", By Zhang Yan, *China Daily*, March 14, 2016 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016twosession/2016-03/14/content\\_23849598.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016twosession/2016-03/14/content_23849598.htm), accessed on March 21, 2016

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, Jesse, "MSDF Training Sub To Visit Philippines; Two Escort Ships To Go On To Port Call in Vietnam", *The Japan Times*, March 16, 2016 at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/16/national/politics-diplomacy/msdf-training-sub-to-visit-philippines-two-escort-ships-to-go-on-to-port-call-in-vietnam/>

<sup>26</sup> "Nearly Two Dozen Pro-Pyongyang Koreans Barred From Japan Under New Sanctions", *Kyodo*, March 14, 2016 at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/14/national/politics-diplomacy/sources-say-22-pro-pyongyang-koreans-banned-re-entering-japan/#.VxhzidR961t>

the transfer of power is aimed at restructuring and refining the line of work of the Joint Staff Office and ministry bureau.<sup>27</sup>

## C. Southeast Asia & Oceania

### ASEAN

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Defence chiefs vow to deepen ties for regional security.**

ASEAN chiefs of defence forces, who convened in Vientiane on March 14, agreed to continue to strengthen cooperation in the field of defence among the 10 ASEAN member states to promote security in the region. The chiefs of ASEAN's defence forces reached the agreement in their joint statement following their 13th informal meeting. Their continuing cooperation, they said in the joint statement, was based on the principles of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consensus-decision making, participation on the basis of a flexible, voluntary and non-binding nature, assets remaining under national command and control and at a pace comfortable to all. This would promote mutual trust, confidence and capacities in addressing regional non-traditional security challenges in an effective and timely manner. The ASEAN defence chiefs acknowledged the complexity of non-traditional security challenges including natural and man-made disasters, climate change, transnational challenges, drug and human trafficking, cyber security, maritime security, and terrorism - all of which pose threats to regional peace, stability, security and prosperity.

They said that they were "reaffirming ASEAN militaries' roles, commitment and collective responsibilities in responding to these security challenges". They also recognised the significance and values of capacity, trust and confidence building at a pace comfortable to all through dialogues, and military-to-military interaction activities to deepen defence cooperative ties between and amongst ASEAN defence establishments in order to enhance capabilities in responding to security threats in an effective and timely manner. The defence chiefs welcomed the progress in military-to-military cooperation and its contribution to maintaining regional peace, security and stability. They reaffirmed the need for a peaceful environment in the South China Sea for the enhancement of peace, stability, economic growth and prosperity in the region.

In this regard, they reaffirmed the need to fully and effectively implement the 2002 Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and work towards the early conclusion of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. The defence chiefs also welcomed the combined exercises to be conducted in 2016 under the framework of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus Experts' Working Groups on the following: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and Military Medicine (co-organised by Laos, Japan, Thailand and Russia); Counter Terrorism and Maritime Security (co-organised by Singapore, Australia, Brunei and New Zealand); and Peacekeeping

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<sup>27</sup> "SDF Beefed-Up Role In Operations Planning To Unite Officers, Bureaucrats, Defence Chief Says," *Kyodo*, March 15, 2016 at [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/15/national/politics-diplomacy/sdf-beefed-role-operations-planning-unite-officers-bureaucrats-defense-chief-says/#.Vxh\\_DtR961v](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/15/national/politics-diplomacy/sdf-beefed-role-operations-planning-unite-officers-bureaucrats-defense-chief-says/#.Vxh_DtR961v)

Operations and Humanitarian Mine Action (co-organised by Cambodia, Republic of Korea, Vietnam and India).<sup>28</sup>

## Southeast Asia

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Laos, Vietnam celebrate border demarcation, maintenance project completion; Singapore, Thailand and US conclude trilateral air exercise; US, Philippines agree on locations covered by defence pact**

The governments of Laos and Vietnam marked the completion of the border demarcation and maintenance of border markers project at a ceremony held in Hanoi, Vietnam. Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong led a high-level Lao delegation at the event on March 16. The Lao prime minister and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Tan Dung congratulated each other on the completion of the project, which had been ongoing for several years. During the ceremony, the two governments signed two documents comprising a Sub-agreement on Borderline and Border Markers, and an Agreement on Border and Border Checkpoint Management. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Thongloun Sisoulith and his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Binh Minh signed the documents, witnessed by the two prime ministers. From 2008-2014, the Lao and Vietnamese governments oversaw a project to install border markers between their 20 adjoining provinces over a distance of 2,337 km. A total of 1,002 markers were installed along the shared border.<sup>29</sup>

A trilateral air exercise conducted by the air forces of Singapore, Thailand and the United States ended on March 18 at Korat Air Base in Thailand, Singapore's Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) said. Exercise Cope Tiger, the 22nd in its series, was conducted in two phases – a command post exercise at Changi Naval Base in Singapore from December 8-11, 2015, and a flying training exercise conducted at Korat Air Base in Thailand from March 7-18. This year's exercise involved 87 aircraft, 48 ground-based air defence systems and about 2,000 personnel from the participating nations. The Republic of Singapore Air Force's (RSAF) Heron-1 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle and Multi-Mission Radar also participated in the Exercise Cope Tiger series for the first time.

The closing ceremony for the exercise was co-officiated by Singapore's Chief of Air Force Major-General Hoo Cher Mou, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Air Force Air Chief Marshal Treetod Sonjance and Air National Guard Assistant to the Commander of the US Pacific Air Forces Major General Michael B Compton. RSAF's Exercise Director for Exercise Cope Tiger 2016, Colonel Sim Peng Shin, highlighted the significance of the annual large-scale air exercise. "This trilateral air combat exercise allows us to hone our air combat readiness and operational capabilities as we engage in air defence and strike operations," he said. "This exercise also allows us to strengthen our close defence relations with Thailand and the US." Conducted annually since 1994, Exercise Cope

<sup>28</sup> "Defence Chiefs Vow To Deepen Ties For Regional Security", *The Nation*, March 15, 2016, at <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/ASEAN-defence-chiefs-vow-to-deepen-ties-for-region-30281632.html>

<sup>29</sup> "Laos, Vietnam Celebrate Border Demarcation, Maintenance Project Completion", *The Jakarta Post*, March 17, 2016, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/03/17/laos-vietnam-celebrate-border-demarcation-maintenance-project-completion.html>

Tiger aims to enhance professionalism and interoperability among the participating forces, and promote closer rapport and mutual understanding among their personnel, MINDEF said.<sup>30</sup>

The US and the Philippines announced five locations where American forces would have access under a new defence pact, including one facing disputed islands in the South China Sea. The announcement came at strategic talks in Washington on March 18, where the allies reiterated their opposition to the militarisation of outposts in those waters, where six Asian governments had competing claims. Another of the five Philippine military bases where the US would have access was on southern Mindanao island, where the US was concerned about the presence of Muslim extremist groups.

The 10-year defence pact was signed by US and Philippine officials in 2014, but it only got the green light in January after the Philippine Supreme Court ruled it was constitutional. It was a key part of the Obama administration effort to reassert its presence in Asia. Philip Goldberg, the US ambassador to the Philippines, said the pact would allow the US to rotate more forces and military assets through that country on a basis of mutual agreement with Manila. It could also conduct construction and position supplies, including for humanitarian relief. Goldberg said that the US was not establishing its own bases as it had in the Philippines until 1992.<sup>31</sup>

## Oceania

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Julie Bishop meets Fijian PM and aid workers in wake of Cyclone Winston; Australia, Indonesia renews push for trade deal amid warming ties; Pacific Community assists Fiji's post-cyclone surveys.**

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop met Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama in Suva to discuss the country's recovery from Cyclone Winston. The category five storm – Fiji's worst-recorded cyclone – swept across the island nation in February, killing more than 40 people and flattening communities. Since then, the Australian Government committed \$15 million in humanitarian assistance for the country and sent more than 500 tonnes of resources and equipment on 30 relief flights. Ms Bishop was in Fiji on a two-day visit to oversee those relief efforts on the ground.

Ms Bishop held formal talks with Mr Bainimarama on March 14, pledging to provide as much support as Fiji requested as it was rebuilding after Cyclone Winston. Speaking after their meeting, Ms Bishop said that Mr Bainimarama highlighted healthcare, education and agriculture as areas the Government was most concerned about. She said that Australia would continue to provide assistance and Defence personnel, while civilian volunteers would maintain a presence in Fiji. She said that Australia's aid commitment was a sign of the normalised relationship between the two countries.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> "Singapore, Thailand and US Conclude Trilateral Air Exercise", *Channel NewsAsia*, March 18, 2016, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/singapore-thailand-and-us/2614646.html>

<sup>31</sup> "US, Philippines Agree On Locations Covered By Defence Pact", *The Economic Times*, March 19, 2016, at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/us-philippines-agree-on-locations-covered-by-defence-pact/articleshow/51466272.cms>

<sup>32</sup> "Julie Bishop Meets Fijian PM and Aid Workers In Wake of Cyclone Winston", *ABC News*, March 14, 2016, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-14/julie-bishop-to-meet-with-fijian-pm-in-wake-of-cyclone-winston/7243440>

Australia and Indonesia on March 16 said that they would formally resume long-stalled negotiations aimed at sealing a bilateral trade agreement between the often uneasy neighbours within 18 months. Australian Trade Minister Steven Ciobo and Indonesian Trade Minister Thomas Trikasih Lembong said in a joint statement that the talks would resume in May after a lengthy hiatus spanning a period of diplomatic tumult. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull visited Indonesia in 2015 in the hope of smoothing over ties strained by rows over spying, the execution of Australian citizens in Indonesia and Australia's tough asylum-seeker policies. "While Indonesia is a close neighbour and firm friend, our trade and economic relationship can and should be performing better," Ciobo said.<sup>33</sup>

Two interdisciplinary teams of oceanographers and damage assessment specialists from the Pacific Community (SPC) were ready to depart on March 18 to conduct a week-long survey of the impacts of tropical cyclone Winston on the island of Ovalau and the southern coast of Vanua Levu. Funded by the World Bank and planned in collaboration with Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and Mineral Resources Department, these surveys by SPC's Geoscience Division would assess damage to buildings, the status of water and sanitation, and the extent of coastal inundation in these areas following the devastating category 5 cyclone. Findings from these surveys would be fed directly into Fiji Government discussions and plans to recover, rebuild, and rehabilitate these areas.<sup>34</sup>

## D. West Asia

### National

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Russia approves 10 year space budget; Cost of Russia's Syrian campaign estimated at US\$ 480 million; Mission to Mars launched from Baikonur space station; Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov likely to get another term; Russia's defence budget to be cut by 5 percent; Yamal LNG project signs contracts for sale of 96 percent of LNG it produces; Russia in talks with Arab foundation Mubadala on selling a stake in Russian Helicopters.**

The Russian government has, on March 17, approved a long-awaited federal program for space exploration, valued at 1.4 trillion roubles (US\$ 20.5 billion) over the next decade. The document, known as the Federal Space Program 2016-2025, outlines Russia's major objectives in space over the next ten years and sets funding targets for individual projects. The original proposal requested 3.4 trillion roubles, but economic troubles have forced multiple cuts over the past year. Russia's space industry is currently undergoing a vast restructuring. Last year, the Federal Space Agency was

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<sup>33</sup> Siegel, Matt, "Australia, Indonesia Renew Push For Trade Deal Amid Warming Ties", *Reuters*, March 16, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-indonesia-idUSKCN0WI12T>

<sup>34</sup> "Pacific Community Assists Fiji's Post-Cyclone Survey", *Scoop*, March 18, 2016, at <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1603/S00045/pacific-community-assists-fijis-post-cyclone-surveys.htm>



liquidated and reformed into a state corporation known as Roscosmos. The company is now in the process of integrating Russian space companies under its wing.<sup>35</sup>

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said, on March 17, that the military operation in Syria has cost Russia approximately 33 billion rubles (US\$ 484 million). He stated ‘the military operation in Syria demanded a certain level of spending, and for the most part, was already included in the Defence Ministry’s 2015 budget for drills and military training’. Earlier, the RBC news agency had estimated the cost of Syrian campaign at 38 billion roubles (US\$ 557 million) minimum, but the Kremlin did not confirm the estimate.<sup>36</sup>

A Russian Proton-M space rocket lifted off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome on March 14. It is carrying a European Space Agency probe designed to sniff out life on the surface of Mars. The probe, known as ExoMars, was successfully delivered into a holding orbit around the Earth, where it will wait for a command from ground controllers to proceed on its seven-month voyage to the Red Planet. The ExoMars probe is the first of a two-phase mission designed by the European Space Agency with its Russian counterpart, Roscosmos. The second stage will launch in 2018. The project is the first expedition sent to Mars with the explicit purpose of searching for signs of life. The ExoMars spacecraft carries with it two components: a Mars-orbiting satellite known as the Trace Gas Orbiter and a prototype landing vehicle known as Schiaparelli, which will test landing techniques for future Mars missions. The two components will separate upon reaching Martian orbit in seven months. As the name suggests, the Trace Gas Orbiter will stay in space, while Schiaparelli makes a fiery descent to the Martian surface.

ExoMars was conceived as a collaborative effort with U.S. space agency NASA and the European Space Agency. Roscosmos joined the project in 2009, and NASA withdrew in 2012 due to funding constraints. The Russian contribution to the project included the launch of ExoMars on a Proton-M rocket, the development of several scientific instruments for the probe, and the development of a landing system for the 2018 ExoMars rover. The second phase of the mission may yet be delayed, however, according to recent statements from European and Russian space agency officials. Both are experiencing funding crunches, and in January ESA chief Jan Woerner predicted a delay of about two years. Woerner’s comments were reinforced by Roscosmos head Igor Komarov before the ExoMars launch in Baikonur. Komarov said the two sides are “discussing” the possibility of rescheduling the launch to 2020, but stressed no final decision has yet been made. Meanwhile, Russian space industry analyst Pavel Luzin has said that the successful launch of the first stage of the ExoMars project will provide a much needed boost to Russia’s image as a spacefaring nation. Luzin predicted the mission’s presumed success is likely to have benefits for Russia’s space program, which is struggling to stay competitive. International cooperation can help Russia move forward in areas that is has fallen behind.<sup>37</sup>

The Moscow Times has reported, citing Kremlin sources, that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov has been reassured by officials that he would keep his seat as Chechen leader. The newspaper

<sup>35</sup> “Russia Approves Long-Awaited 10-Year Space Budget”, *The Moscow Times*, March 17, 2016 <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-approves-long-awaited-10-year-space-budget/562859.html>

<sup>36</sup> “Cost of Russia’s Syrian Campaign Revealed as \$480 Million”, *The Moscow Times*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/cost-of-russias-syrian-campaign-revealed-as-480-million/562893.html>

<sup>37</sup> “Mission to Mars Launched from Russia's Baikonur”, *The Moscow Times*, March 14, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/mission-to-mars-launched-from-russias-baikonur/562425.html>



reported that ‘there are no doubts that Kadyrov will be reappointed’. In early March, Kadyrov had claimed that he might not run for another term, adding that he would accept any decision made by President Putin.<sup>38</sup>

Deputy Defence Minister Tatiana Shevtsova has said that Russia’s defence budget will be cut by 5 percent in 2016 and will not affect the state armament and social programmes. She added that the ministry’s social obligations toward Russian servicemen and women were also exempt from the budget cuts. The 2016 military spending in the country was expected to amount to 3.14 trillion roubles (US\$ 43.6 billion at the current exchange rate) or 4 percent of GDP. A 5-percent cut amounts to some 160 billion roubles. In 2015, the Russian military budget was reduced by nearly 4 percent.<sup>39</sup>

The Yamal LNG project has, on March 17, signed contracts for the sale of 96 percent of liquefied natural gas (LNG) it produces. As such, the countries of Asian-Pacific region account for 86 percent of the contracts. Yamal LNG is implementing a liquefied natural gas plant construction project with the annual capacity of 16.5 million tonnes on the resource base of Yuzhno-Tambeiskoe field. LNG production start is scheduled in 2017. In December 2015, China’s Silk Road Fund signed an agreement on purchase of 9.9 percent in Yamal LNG from Russian natural gas producer Novatek. After the acquisition the share of Novatek in the project is to be reduced to 50.1 percent. China’s CNPC holds 29.9 percent, while French Total owns 20 percent and in the project. Earlier in December 2015, as part of the deal on selling the stake in the project Novatek received a 15 year loan from the Silk Route fund to finance the project.<sup>40</sup>

Russian state corporation Rostec and officials of the government are in talks with the Mubadala foundation from the United Arab Emirates about selling the stake in the Russian Helicopters. The Russian Helicopters company is part of state hi-tech corporation Rostec. In June 2013, Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and Mubadala set up a joint fund worth US\$ 2 billion, which has till date invested in 13 companies and projects. Russian Helicopters is the sole Russian rotorcraft designer and manufacturer with the capability to design, manufacture, service and test modern civilian and military helicopters. The company includes design bureaus, helicopter assembly plants, components production, maintenance and repair enterprises, aircraft repair plants, and helicopter service companies providing after-sales support in Russia and abroad. The company accounts for about 35 percent and 50 percent of the global market of combat and medium military transport helicopters.<sup>41</sup>

## Russia: International

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Putin orders Russian forces to withdraw from Syria; U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to discuss Syrian developments with President Putin in Moscow; Putin and Obama discuss Russia’s military withdrawal from Syria; U.S. says Russian sanctions to remain till Crimea is**

<sup>38</sup> “Kadyrov to Get Another Term, Say Kremlin Sources (Exclusive)”, *The Moscow Times*, March 16, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/kadyrov-to-get-another-term-say-kremlin-sources-exclusive/562640.html>

<sup>39</sup> “Russian Defence Budget to Be Cut by 5%, Not 10%”, *Sputnik News*, March 5, 2016 at <http://sputniknews.com/russia/20160305/1035839016/russia-defense-budget.html#ixzz43WQPnBY4>

<sup>40</sup> “Yamal LNG Project Signs Contracts For Sale of 96% of LNG It Produces”, *Itar-Tass*, March 17, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/863064>

<sup>41</sup> “Russia in Talks With Arab Foundation Mubadala On Selling Stake in Russian Helicopters”, *Itar-Tass*, March 11, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/861576>

**returned to Ukraine; U.S. Defence Secretary says Russia is the main threat to U.S. security; EU calls upon UN countries to impose sanctions against Russia; Hungary and Italy assert that there will be no automatic extension of EU sanctions against Russia; Russia and Tajikistan start large-scale military exercises on Afghan border; Russian and Iranian Foreign Ministers discuss ceasefire implementation in Syria; Russia and Egypt agree to resume air links; Gazprom's gas exports to Germany grows by 37 percent in 2016; Russia donates 10,000 Kalashnikov guns to Afghanistan; Russia and Morocco sign statement on closer strategic partnership; Russia says Kurd's self-determination possible only within the framework of new Syrian constitution; Kremlin refuses to comment on media reports of Russian arms supplies to Iraqi Kurds; Russia and Vietnam to intensify security cooperation.**

President Vladimir Putin has, on March 14, ordered the withdrawal of “the main part” of Russia’s forces in Syria. He stated that the withdrawal is a result of the “completion” of the Defence Ministry’s objectives in Syria. The announcement coincided with the resumption of peace talks in Geneva. However, Putin also added that Russia can beef up its military presence in Syria “within hours” to any scale the situation may demand. Putin stated that the partial withdrawal of Russian troops will leave in its wake a favourable “balance” for the Syrian government forces. Referring to ongoing battles around the Islamic State-controlled city of Palmyra, Putin said that he hoped that “this pearl of the world's civilization, or at least what's left of it after it hosted bandits, will be returned to the Syrian people and to the world.”

He also stated that “given our support to strengthen the Syrian army, I am certain that in the near future we will see new significant successes of patriotic forces in their battle against terrorism. The Russian Defence Ministry has previously said that it will continue air strikes against terrorist targets after the partial withdrawal, and Putin confirmed his army will continue battling terror groups in Syria. Meanwhile, UN special envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura has praised Putin's move as ‘a significant development’. He stated ‘we hope, and we shall be expecting and hoping that this will be happening, that we will be seeing this decision bringing some positive influence on the actual progress of the talks’. It has also been estimated that the Russian air strikes have helped Assad's forces regain control over some 10,000 square kilometres of land.<sup>42</sup>

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has said that he will travel to Moscow to discuss the Syrian crisis with President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The U.S. Department of State reported that ‘Kerry is traveling to Moscow to discuss how we can effectively move the political process forward and try to take advantage of this moment’.<sup>43</sup>

Russian President Vladimir Putin has discussed, over a telephonic conversation held on March 15, Russia’s partial military withdrawal from Syria. The Kremlin press report stated that ‘the two leaders exchanged opinions on the progress in implementing the statement by Russia and the United States, as co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group, on cessation of hostilities in Syria. The leaders stated that the Russian-US initiative, supported by UN Security Council Resolution 2268, has allowed for a sharp decrease in the scale of bloodshed on Syrian land. The President of Russia told the President of the United States that after fulfilling the primary objectives

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<sup>42</sup> “Putin: Russian Can Redeploy to Syria 'Within Hours'”, *The Moscow Times*, March 18, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-russian-can-redeploy-to-syria-within-hours/562925.html>

<sup>43</sup> “Kerry to Discuss Syria with Putin, Lavrov in Moscow”, *The Moscow Times*, March 16, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/kerry-to-discuss-syria-with-putin-lavrov-in-moscow/562636.html>

set before the Russian Armed Forces in the fight against international terrorism, a decision was made to withdraw the main part of the Russian Aerospace Forces troops. This will certainly serve as a good signal to all conflicting sides and create conditions for the start of a true peace process. The heads of state noted the importance of full coordination of efforts between representatives of Russia and the United States, including on military matters, to preserve the truce and ensure providing humanitarian assistance to besieged towns, as well as effectively fighting terrorist groups. The presidents called for intensification of the political process for settling the Syrian conflict, expressing support for the talks between the Government of Syria and the opposition, which are starting in Geneva under the auspices of the UN, following which the Syrian people should determine the future setup of their state themselves. In discussing the situation in Ukraine, Mr Putin stressed the need for complete fulfilment of the Minsk Agreements by the Ukrainian authorities. The leaders confirmed their intent to continue work with the parties to the conflict in the interest of settling it'.<sup>44</sup>

U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby has said in a press statement, released on March 17 that sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Crimea is returned to Ukraine. The announcement came on the eve of the second anniversary of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. Kirby stated 'we will not accept the redrawing of borders by force in the 21st century. Sanctions related to Crimea will remain in place as long as the occupation continues. We again call on Russia to end that occupation and return Crimea to Ukraine'. He added that the U.S. does not recognize the referendum, and remains deeply concerned by the situation in Russian-occupied Crimea, where occupation 'authorities' suppress dissent and where ethnic and religious minorities – especially Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians – face serious and ongoing repression'.<sup>45</sup>

The United States Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter has named Russia as one of the biggest challenges to U.S. security. Carter identified five major challenges facing the U.S. military – Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and terrorism – at the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services' hearing of the 2017 defence budget on March 18. He stated 'today's security environment is very different from what it was 25 years ago. It requires new actions and new investments'. Carter referred to Russia and China as 'rivals, who have developed and continue to develop military systems that threaten the United States' position in some areas'. Earlier, Carter had addressed the Economic Club of Washington on the necessity to reshape spending priorities to reflect a new strategic environment marked by Russian assertiveness and the rise of the Islamic State.<sup>46</sup>

On the second anniversary of Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, the European Union has condemned Moscow's actions and called upon the countries of the United Nations to join in sanctions against Russia. A statement published on EU's European External Action Service, stated that 'the EU will continue to adhere to the full implementation of its non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures. The EU again calls upon the states-members of the United Nations to consider similar non-recognition measures in line with the UN General Assembly

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<sup>44</sup> "Telephone Conversation with US President Barack Obama", *President of Russia*, March 15, 2016 at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51513>

<sup>45</sup> "Russian Sanctions to Remain Until Crimea Returned to Ukraine – U.S.", *The Moscow Times*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-sanctions-to-remain-until-crimea-returned-to-ukraine--us/562635.html>

<sup>46</sup> "U.S. Defence Secretary: Russia is Main Threat to U.S. Security", *The Moscow Times*, March 18, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/us-defense-secretary-russia-is-main-threat-to-us-security/562932.html>

Resolution 68 / 262'. The statement added that following annexation, the human rights situation in Crimea has deteriorated to a serious degree. The EU expressed particular concern over the persecution of the Crimean Tatars. In addition, the EU has demanded that Russia release Ukrainian citizens Oleg Sentsov and Alexander Kolchenko, who have been 'detained and convicted in violation of international law'.<sup>47</sup>

Italian and Hungarian Foreign Ministers have said, on March 15, that there will be no automatic extension of EU sanctions against Russia. While some sanctions, such as asset freezes and travel bans on Russians and Russian companies, had been extended by the EU recently, yet discussions concerning sanctions on Russian banking, defence and energy sectors continue to drag on.<sup>48</sup>

Russia and Tajikistan have, on March 16, begun large-scale military exercises to practice defending against an invasion by Islamist extremists into Central Asia. The exercises will take place over six days along more than 1,000 kilometres of the Tajik-Afghan border, which is the site of much speculation about a possible incursion of Islamist extremists from Afghanistan into Central Asia. Russian forces and equipment will include not only those from Russia's 201st military base in Tajikistan, but also others from its Central Military District - the first time that has happened. In addition, Russia has deployed two strategic bombers to practice exchanging data with officers on the ground in Tajikistan. Other planes will be deployed from Russia's Kant airbase in Kyrgyzstan. The exercise comes at a time of heightened tension around the border - groups of armed men with unclear motivations reportedly crossed in to Tajikistan from Afghanistan recently. It also comes at a time when Tajikistan appears to be expanding its roster of military allies, with recent high-level visits by Pakistani and Chinese military officials as well as the announcement of substantially expanded U.S. military aid.<sup>49</sup>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has discussed the prospects of implementing the Syrian ceasefire agreement with his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif on March 18. The two leaders stressed the necessity to establish a sustainable political process involving representatives of the Syrian government and a wide spectrum of opposition forces on the basis of the principles reiterated in the resolutions of the International Syria Support Group and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.<sup>50</sup>

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said, on March 16, that Russia and Egypt have agreed to address the issue of resuming air links within the tightest possible deadline under the condition that security measures are observed. Mr. Lavrov made the statement during the visit of Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry to Moscow.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> "EU Calls Upon UN Countries to Impose Sanctions Against Russia", *The Moscow Times*, March 18, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/eu-calls-upon-un-countries-to-impose-sanctions-against-russia/562930.html>

<sup>48</sup> "No Automatic Extension of EU Sanctions Over Russia - Hungary, Italy", *The Moscow Times*, March 15, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/no-automatic-extension-of-eu-sanctions-over-russia-hungary-italy/562585.html>

<sup>49</sup> "Russia, Tajikistan Start Large-Scale Military Exercises On Afghan Border", *The Moscow Times*, March 16, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-tajikistan-start-large-scale-military-exercises-on-afghan-border/562793.html>

<sup>50</sup> "Russian, Iranian FMs Discuss Ceasefire Implementation in Syria – Russian Foreign Ministry", *Itar-Tass*, March 18, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/863547>

<sup>51</sup> "Russia and Egypt Agree To Resume Air Links – FM", *Itar-Tass*, March 16, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/862737>

Gazprom's gas supplies to non-CIS countries grew 33.5 percent from January 1 to March 15 this year to 36.5 billion cubic meters. Exports to Germany increased by 37 percent and amounted to 9.9 billion cubic meters of gas. Earlier, the Chairman of Gazprom Board of Directors Viktor Zubkov had said that Gazprom can deliver to Europe 160 billion cubic meters of gas in 2016.<sup>52</sup>

Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin has said, on March 15, that Russia has donated 10,000 Kalashnikov guns and 2.1 million cartridges to the Afghan government in February 2016. He added that Russia will continue to assist Kabul in training Afghan law enforcers. He stated 'Russia is worried over the growing activities of Taliban and other terrorist groups and that Afghanistan's national security forces are a guarantee of stability in the country.'<sup>53</sup>

Talks between Russian President Vladimir Putin and King of Morocco Mohammed VI on March 15 yielded seven documents, including a statement on closer strategic partnership. Other documents include a Russian-Moroccan statement on countering international terrorism, intergovernmental agreements on air service, on cooperation in the area of environment protection and rational use of natural resources, on cooperation in the area of sea fisheries, on encouraging and mutual protection of investments, on mutual protection of classified information in the military and military technical spheres. The two countries also inked a convention on extradition. Apart from these, the two sides signed memorandums on mutual understanding between the energy ministries and on energy cooperation, on mutual understanding between the Russian ministry of natural resources and Morocco's ministry of energy, mines, water and environment, on cooperation in the area of geological prospecting and development of mineral resources, on mutual understanding between Russia's federal service for veterinary and phytosanitary control and Morocco's national food safety office in the area of phytosanitary control of plant products.<sup>54</sup>

Russian presidential envoy for the Middle East and Africa and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov has said, on March 18, that self-determination of Kurds is possible only within the framework of the new Syrian constitution. He stated 'the self-determination of Kurds should be outlined in the framework of new Syrian constitution, and it should be coordinated with other participants in the negotiations process. These issues should be determined on the basis of consensus'. Bogdanov noted that the decision to declare a federal region in Syria's north was met negatively by participants in inter-Syrian talks in Geneva - both government and opposition. "This decision was beyond the framework of the negotiations process," he stated.<sup>55</sup>

Russian Presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov has refused to comment on media reports that Russia has supplied weapons to Iraqi Kurds. Earlier, several media previously reported that Russia supplied five Zu-23-2 anti-aircraft twin-barrelled autocannons and around 20,000 rounds of ammunition to Iraqi Kurds. It was noted that the weapons were delivered through Baghdad on coordination with the central government.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Russia's Gazprom Gas Exports To Germany Grow 37% This Year", *Itar-Tass*, March 16, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/862649>

<sup>53</sup> "10,000 Kalashnikov Guns Donated By Russia To Afghan Government - Russian UN Envoy", *Itar-Tass*, March 15, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/862576>

<sup>54</sup> "Russia, Morocco Sign Statement on Closer Strategic Partnership", *Itar-Tass*, March 15, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/862527>

<sup>55</sup> "Diplomat: Kurds' Self-Determination Possible only in Framework of New Syrian Constitution", *Itar-Tass*, March 15, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/863484>

<sup>56</sup> "Kremlin Does Not Comment on Media Reports of Russian Arms Supplies To Iraqi Kurds", *Itar-Tass*, March 15, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/863050>



Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council Yevgeny Lukyanov has said, on March 16, that Russia and Vietnam are intensifying and expanding partnership in the field of security. He made this statement against the backdrop of Russian-Vietnamese expert consultations on regional and international security that took place in Hanoi on March 16. He also stated that ‘Moscow and Hanoi consider all aspects of cooperation in the security area not only from the bilateral relations perspective, but also in terms of regional and international relations. Today Russia and Vietnam reaffirm their readiness to jointly counter modern threats and challenges such as international terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration, maritime piracy, cross-border crime and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction’.<sup>57</sup>

## India-Russia Relations

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **India and Russia sign oil deals worth US\$ 4 billion; Russia in talks with India to sell three Project 11356 frigates.**

Leading Indian state-run oil companies have, on March 17, signed a clutch of deals potentially worth over US\$ 4 billion once all of them are completed for acquiring a stake in Russian major Rosneft's most promising oilfields in Siberia, adding commercial depth to the Soviet-era strategic ties between India and Russia. The deals were signed during the visit of Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin to India. As such, Indian Oil, Oil India and a unit of BPCL agreed to take 29.9 percent in Tas-Yuryakh oilfield in east Siberia for US\$ 1.3 billion. The consortium also signed heads of agreement for taking a 24 percent stake in Vankor field, also in east Siberia, for over US\$ 2 billion and pay another US\$ 180 million as its share of future capex. ONGC Videsh, the overseas arm of ONGC, signed an MoU to raise its total stake in Vankor to 26 percent for by acquiring additional equity at a cost of US\$ 925 million. ONGC Videsh had in September last year bought 15 percent in the field for US\$ 1.3 billion. The two sides also agreed to examine prospects of joint trading and possibility and long-term crude supply contracts. The IOC-led consortium signed another MoU for exploration, taking a stake in developing the Vankor cluster fields of Suzunskoye, Tagulskoye and Lodochnoye. While the IOC-OIL-Bharat Petro Resources deal for a 29.9 percent stake in Tass-Yuryakh oilfield is a concluded agreement, the consortium's Vankor deal is an initial pact and a sale purchase agreement is yet to be concluded. Similarly, OVL's increase in stake in Vankor too is yet to be concluded. Vankor's oil is shipped to Asia, mostly to China. Rosneft had last year sold a 20 percent stake in Tas-Yuryakh to BP for US\$ 750 million. The Russian firm will hold 50 percent. Meanwhile, Sechin met Essar Oil officials during his visit and said that Rosneft hopes to conclude a deal to buy a 49 percent stake in the 400,000 barrel-per-day Vadinar refinery in western India by the end of June. The proposed deal would give Rosneft an additional outlet for its oil as it grapples with a global crude supply glut. The deals put oil into the main frame of bilateral engagement – so far dominated by defence and strategic issues and show New Delhi's resolve to push big-ticket oilfield acquisitions abroad when low crude prices are making life difficult for operators and China feels hamstrung by economic slowdown. For Rosneft, Russia's biggest producer and the world's largest publicly-traded oil

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<sup>57</sup> “Russia, Vietnam Intensify Security Partnership – Russia’s Security Council”, *Itar-Tass*, March 16, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/862637>



company, the deals bring funds for developing new fields and paying off part of massive debt raised to fund acquisition of TNK-BP, a vertically integrated oil company, in 2013.<sup>58</sup>

Vice-President of the United Shipbuilding Corporation for Military Ship Construction Igor Ponomaryov has said, on March 11, that Russia is holding talks with India to sell three Project 11356 frigates that were earlier destined for the Russian Black Sea Fleet. He stated that the engines for these warships 'have been fully paid for by the Ukrainian side. They are staying in Ukraine and therefore we'll be resolving the issue related to these engines.' A total of six Project 11356 frigates were planned to be built for the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The first frigate has already become operational in the Russian Navy and another two will join it by May and in August. These warships are equipped with the Ukrainian-made engines, which has caused uncertainty with the construction of the other three frigates of this series. The United Shipbuilding Corporation had said last year that these warships would be built but would be equipped with domestic engines. India operates six Talwar-class frigates, which are the Project 11356 predecessors developed for exports.<sup>59</sup>

## E. West Asia

### Iran

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Iran's February oil output hits 4- year high: OPEC; Iran, Turkey cooperation can resolve regional crises: Zarif.**

Iran's oil production in February hit 3.132 million barrels per day (bpd), posting its largest monthly gain since the imposition of sanctions on the country in 2012. According to the latest report of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Iran's oil output surged by 187,800 bpd in February to surpass its January figures which stood at 2.944 million bpd. Iran heavy crude oil price in February also rose to \$27.28, showing an increase of \$3.21 compared to its previous month, the report says. Based on February figures, Iran is the third largest producer of crude oil after Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Earlier this week, Managing Director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Rokneddin Javadi said the rising trend of crude oil exports will continue in the next Iranian year which begins on March 20, during which total production will rise to 4 million bpd.<sup>60</sup>

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says Iran and Turkey can join hands in resolving ongoing crises facing the Middle East region. "Cooperation between Iran and Turkey is effective and useful in settling regional crises," Zarif said in a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul. Iran's top diplomat also underlined the need for the highest ever cooperation between Tehran and Ankara and said "high-ranking officials at the Islamic Republic of Iran attach a great significance to relations with Turkey." Zarif also stated that Iran-Turkey can cooperate in presenting a successful model of proximity among religions, rather than religious division. Erdogan, for his part, said the promotion of relations between Iran and Turkey can serve the interests of the

<sup>58</sup> "India, Russia Oil Ties with \$4billion Deals", *The Times of India*, March 17, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/India-Russia-oil-ties-with-4billion-deals/articleshow/51434055.cms>

<sup>59</sup> "Russia in Talks with India To Sell Three Project 11356 Frigates", *Itar-Tass*, March 11, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/861603>

<sup>60</sup> "Iran's February Oil Output Hits 4- Year High: OPEC", *Tehran Times*, March 16, 2016 at <http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/300159/Iran-s-February-oil-output-hits-4-year-high-OPEC>

two neighbours and contribute to regional peace and stability. The West wants the Muslim world to get weak, the Turkish president said, noting that Ankara and Tehran shoulder a heavy responsibility in resolving regional crises. They also recognised Daesh as a common threat to both the countries and established a need to come up with sustainable solution. Zarif said, “Sustainable cooperation between Iran and Turkey would send a positive message to the Muslim world, including Sunnis and Shias,”<sup>61</sup>

## Iraq and Syria

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Jubouri and Saudi king discuss bilateral relations between two countries; Masum: Iraq needs international support to proceed with its reconstruction plans; Abadi meets Pakistani Military Production Minister to discuss military and security cooperation; China to Continue Playing Positive Role to Find Political Solution to Crisis in Syria-- Ambassador; Damascus Calls for Return of Occupied Golan Heights.**

Iraqi Parliament Speaker Salim al-Jubouri met the Saudi King Salman bin Abdul Aziz in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. The two sides discussed bilateral relations and “aspects of parliamentary cooperation” between the two countries. The official Saudi Press Agency SPA said in a statement followed by *IraqiNews.com*, “The Saudi King Salman bin Abdul Aziz met the Iraq’s parliament speaker Salim al-Jubouri and his accompanying delegation in his office in Yamamah Palace in Riyadh.” The statement added, “The two sides discussed bilateral relations and aspects of parliamentary cooperation between the two brotherly countries.”<sup>62</sup>

Iraqi President Fuad Masum met the British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond and his accompanying delegation in al-Salam Palace in Baghdad, while emphasized Iraq’s urgent need for an international support in order to proceed with its reconstruction plans and develop its economy. Masum also pointed out that Iraq is keen to develop its relations with the United Kingdom to include all political, economic and cultural fields to serve the interests of the two countries. The presidential media office said in a statement followed by *IraqiNews.com*, “The two sides discussed a number of regional and international issues, as well as the victories achieved by Iraq against terrorism.”<sup>63</sup>

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi met the Pakistani Minister of Military Production to discuss strengthening the military and security cooperation between the two countries, as well as the war against ISIS, while Islamabad affirmed its readiness to support Iraq in all fields. Prime Minister information office said in a statement received by *IraqiNews.com*, “Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi met the Pakistani Minister of Military Production Mr. Rana Tanweer and his occupying delegation.” The statement added, “The two sides discussed strengthening bilateral relations, military and

<sup>61</sup> “Iran, Turkey Cooperation Can Resolve Regional Crises: Zarif”, *Iran Daily*, March 19, 2016 at <http://www.iran-daily.com/News/138437.html>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

<sup>62</sup> “Jubouri and Saudi King Discuss Bilateral Relations between Two Countries”, *Iraqi News*, March 15, 2016 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/jubouri-saudi-monarch-discuss-bilateral-relations-two-countries/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

<sup>63</sup> “Masum: Iraq needs International Support to Proceed with Its Reconstruction Plans”, *Iraqi News*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/masum-iraq-needs-international-support-proceed-reconstruction-plans/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

security cooperation, issues of common interest and the exchange of experiences between the two countries, in addition to the war against ISIS.”<sup>64</sup>

China will continue to play a positive role in support of the political process in Syria, the Chinese Ambassador in Damascus Wang Kejian has stressed, pointing out that China, as a UN permanent member, shoulders great responsibility regarding maintaining peace and stability in the world. In a special interview with the Chinese news agency “Xinhua”, Kejian said “the international community has started to realize that the solution to the crisis in Syria is only political.” The ambassador affirmed that China has rejected all forms of foreign interference in Syria’s internal affairs, has supported political means to solve the crisis in the country and has exerted all possible efforts in this respect. He referred to China’s efforts to make the intra-Syrian dialogue a success.<sup>65</sup>

The Syrian government delegation calls for the liberation of occupied Syrian territories, including the Golan Heights, Head of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Syrian-Syrian dialogue in Geneva Bashar Jaafari said on Wednesday, disclosing proposals on the political settlement, the Russian Sputnik reported. Jaafari, who submitted the proposals to Special UN Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, requested the envoy to discuss these proposals with opposition members involved in intra-Syrian negotiations underway in Geneva. “Another point [of the Basic Proposals] is that we call through the Special Envoy on all of us, the government’s delegation and delegations of the oppositions, to engage into a clear-cut commitment to liberating our occupied territories – the Syrian occupied Golan [Heights], back to the borders of June 1967,” Jaafari said. The Golan Heights is internationally recognized as the Syrian territory and the United Nations has repeatedly stated that Israel’s occupation of Golan Heights is illegal, and called for its return to Syria.<sup>66</sup>

## Israel and Palestine

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Moscow wants more trade with Israel, Russian PM tells Rivlin; Peace Now: Israel Reinstating Pre-Oslo Policy of Vast Land Confiscations.**

Wrapping up a two-day visit to Russia, President Reuven Rivlin met with Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev for talks aimed at strengthening bilateral trade and economic relations between the two countries. In light of US and EU sanctions levied on Russia over its military intervention in Ukraine last year, Medvedev said, Moscow was “open” to increasing its imports from Israel. “I see in the near future a real opportunity to increase trade. Recently, we have encountered export restrictions to Europe, Turkey has left our market and we are open to more exports from Israel,” he said at a joint press conference, according to a statement from Rivlin’s office. Both leaders came out in support of ongoing bilateral talks seeking to establish an Israel-Russia free trade agreement, the

<sup>64</sup> “Abadi Meets Pakistani Military Production Minister to Discuss Military and Security Cooperation”, *Iraqi News*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/abadi-discuss-pakistan-military-security-cooperation-war-isis/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

<sup>65</sup> “China to Continue Playing Positive Role to Find Political Solution to Crisis in Syria-- Ambassador”, *Syria Times*, March 15, 2016 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/22786-china-to-continue-playing-positive-role-to-find-political-solution-to-crisis-in-syria-ambassador>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

<sup>66</sup> “Damascus Calls for Return of Occupied Golan Heights”, *Syria Times*, March 16, 2016 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/22817-damascus-calls-for-return-of-occupied-golan-heights>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

statement said. Medvedev called for increased cooperation with Israel in the fields of agriculture, hi-tech, space exploration, energy, and medical technology.<sup>67</sup>

Israel has reinstated a policy of confiscating vast swathes of Palestinian land for settlement expansion in a trend not seen since the pre-Oslo period in the 1980s, Peace Now reported. The Israeli settlement watchdog pointed chiefly to a vast tract of Palestinian land south of Jericho that was declared “state land” by Israel’s civil administration last week in one of Israel’s largest land grabs in recent years. The group reported 2,342 dunams (580 acres) of land in the southern occupied West Bank area had been signed off as Israeli government property on March 10. The seizure far surpassed the 1,500 dunams (370 acres) in the area initially approved for a takeover by Israel’s Minister of Defence in January, according to the watchdog. It paves the way for the construction of 358 housing units in the illegal settlement of Almog, and will set aside large amounts of land for Israel’s trade and tourism sectors, despite belonging to Palestinians in occupied territory.<sup>68</sup>

## The Gulf

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Bahrain deports Hezbollah-linked Lebanese; Kuwait security chief to Obama: we’re not free-riders; Saudi Arabia not convinced by Iran overtures**

Bahrain has deported several Lebanese residents over their links or support to the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, the Ministry of Interior said on its Twitter account. “A number of Lebanese residents have been deported after it was confirmed that they belonged to and supported terrorist Hezbollah,” the ministry said in a statement posted on its Twitter account. The ministry did not provide any further details, including on the number of people involved. Lebanese press reported last week that up to 10 families had been ordered to leave Bahrain within 24 hours. The move comes a day after Bahrain’s neighbour Saudi Arabia warned that it will punish citizens and residents who “support or demonstrate belonging” to Hezbollah. Bahrain and fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab League fellow members have classified the armed militia as a terrorist group. The GCC is made up of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.<sup>69</sup>

Kuwait is not a “free-rider” in US-led campaigns against terrorism and other threats, a senior Kuwaiti security official said on Thursday, rejecting comments by President Barack Obama critical of some US allies. Shaikh Thamer Al Sabah, President of Kuwait’s National Security Bureau, was referring to Obama’s remarks to *The Atlantic* magazine last week in which he said some states in the Gulf and Europe were “free-riders” who called for US action without getting involved themselves. In an interview, Shaikh Thamer said Kuwait, like fellow Gulf state Qatar, had opened up air bases and airspace for the US-led coalition bombing Daesh in Syria and Iraq. Aircraft from other Gulf countries had carried out sorties, said Shaikh Thamer, a member of Kuwait’s ruling family. “I am just wondering what a free ride is when we do all of these things,” he said, referring to Kuwait’s role. “When we share intelligence, when we open our air, land and sea, when we spend

<sup>67</sup> “Moscow Wants More Trade with Israel, Russian PM tells Rivlin”, *Times of Israel*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/moscow-wants-more-trade-with-israel-russian-pm-tells-rivlin/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

<sup>68</sup> “Peace Now: Israel Reinstating Pre-Oslo Policy of Vast Land Confiscations”, *Palestine Chronicles*, March 15, 2016 at <http://www.palestinechronicle.com/peace-now-israel-reinstating-pre-oslo-policy-of-vast-land-confiscations/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

<sup>69</sup> “Bahrain Deports Hezbollah-Linked Lebanese”, *Gulf News*, March 14, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-deports-hezbollah-linked-lebanese-1.1690053>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

billions of dollars in trying to combat terrorism and trying to help the Syrian refugees, how is it free?" he added.<sup>70</sup>

Diplomatic sources in Riyadh have ruled out an official Saudi response to the reported Iranian attempts to reach out to Riyadh. A report said that Mahmoud Alavi, the Iranian minister of intelligence, recently visited Kuwait and handed over to leaders there a written message from President Hassan Rouhani pertaining to relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and on an earnest desire to reach a settlement on regional issues without any foreign interference. Gulf diplomats said that Kuwait has conveyed the message to GCC leaders, including the purported wish expressed by Iran's leaders to start a new chapter in its relations with the Gulf countries based on the principle of "settling pending issues through a quiet dialogue", Kuwaiti daily Al Rai reported. The sources told the daily that each of the GCC countries was working on individual responses to the Iranian move and preparing confidence-building measures given "past experiences in which the Iranian deeds on the ground were totally different from their words". However, a report in the Saudi daily Okaz, citing diplomatic sources, said that an official response from Saudi Arabia was unlikely.<sup>71</sup>

Russia's partial withdrawal of forces from Syria is "a very positive step", Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Adel Al Jubeir said on Wednesday, adding he hoped it would compel President Bashar Al Assad to make concessions. Saudi Arabia is a leading supporter of the rebels fighting Al Assad and was aghast at Russia's intervention in support of the Syrian president last year that helped to turn the war in his favour. "It is our hope that it will contribute to an acceleration of the political process based on the Geneva 1 declaration and that it will compel the Al Assad regime to make the concessions necessary to bring about a political transition," Al Jubeir said. Al Jubeir's comments, made to Reuters and local state television channels, were Saudi Arabia's first official response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement of the partial withdrawal of forces.<sup>72</sup>

## F. The United State of America

### National

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Diplomacy has a role to play in the fight against terror: Obama; Sequestration poses a great risk to the funding of critical investments: Carter; Space is crucial to U.S. national security; U.S. Cyber Command has witnessed intensified cyberspace operations; New commanders for U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Forces Korea to be confirmed by the Senate.**

President Barack Obama said at the State Department on March 14 that all aspects of government have a responsibility to keep America safe and secure, and diplomacy -- like military power -- has a role to play in the fight against terror. The president spoke at the department's chiefs of mission

<sup>70</sup> "Kuwait Security Chief To Obama: We're Not Free-Riders", *Gulf News*, March 17, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-security-chief-to-obama-we-re-not-free-riders-1.1692655>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

<sup>71</sup> "Saudi Arabia Not Convinced by Iran Overtures", *Gulf News*, March 20, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-not-convinced-by-iran-overtures-1.1693784>

<sup>72</sup> "Russia Withdrawal Will Force Al Assad To Make Concessions: Saudi Minister", *Gulf News*, 16 March 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/syria/russia-withdrawal-will-force-al-assad-to-make-concessions-saudi-minister-1.1691829>. Accessed on 1 April 2016



conference. Chiefs of mission are the highest-ranking U.S. representatives in American embassies. The president told the chiefs that they have a role to play in the effort against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. He said diplomacy is crucial because it is the only way the Syrian civil war is going to end. A peace settlement in Syria will go a long way to ending the tyranny of ISIL in the self-proclaimed caliphate, he added.<sup>73</sup>

Defence Secretary Ash Carter told lawmakers on March 17 that the United States is facing five global strategic challenges, while at home sequestration poses a great risk to the funding of critical investments. "Today's security environment is dramatically different from the last 25 years, requiring new ways of investing and operating," Carter said at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee on the fiscal year 2017 defence budget request. He testified with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., and Defence Department Comptroller Mike McCord. Carter listed Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and terrorism as the five evolving strategic challenges that are driving the DoD's planning and budgeting, he told the panel. The defence budget request totals \$582.7 billion -- \$523.9 billion in the base budget and \$58.8 billion in the overseas contingency operations fund. The funding request takes the "long view" of current and evolving security threats, Carter said.<sup>74</sup>

Space is crucial to U.S. national security, and the Defence Department and intelligence agencies are working together well to ensure the United States dominates that domain, officials told the House Armed Service Committee's strategic forces subcommittee on March 15. Access to space, building a Joint Space Operations Centre and the close working environment between DoD and the intelligence community were among the topics discussed in the hearing. Air Force Gen. John E. Hyten, the commander of Air Force Space Command and DoD's point man for space, said that cooperation is the best he has seen in his service.<sup>75</sup>

Cybercom commander Navy Adm. Michael S. Rogers told a House panel on March 16 that U.S. Cyber Command has witnessed intensified cyberspace operations by state and non-state actors and wide-ranging malicious cyber activities targeting the government and the private sector in the past year. Rogers, who is also the National Security Agency director and Central Security Service chief, testified on Cybercom's segment of the fiscal year 2017 Defence Department budget request before the House Armed Services Committee's emerging threats and capabilities subcommittee. He highlighted Cybercom's challenges and initiatives in the past year. Cybercom continues to look for signs that nations such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea and non-state actors such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant are developing "significant improvements" in their cyber capabilities, Rogers said.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Garamone, Jim, "Obama: U.S. Diplomats, Military Must Partner to Confront Threats", *DoD News*, March 14, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/693041/obama-us-diplomats-military-must-partner-to-confront-threats>

<sup>74</sup> Ferdinando, Lisa, "Carter Outlines Security Challenges, Warns Against Sequestration", *DoD News*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/696449/carter-outlines-security-challenges-warns-against-sequestration>; and, Garamone, Jim, "Dunford Discusses DoD Budget Request at Senate Hearing", *DoD News*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/696397/dunford-discusses-dod-budget-request-at-senate-hearing>

<sup>75</sup> Garamone, Jim, "DoD, Intel Leaders Partner on Space Capabilities", *DoD News*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/696140/dod-intel-leaders-partner-on-space-capabilities>

<sup>76</sup> Cronk, Terri Moon, "Cybercom Commander: Other Nations' Cyberspace Ops Intensified", *DoD News*, March 18, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/698054/cybercom-commander-other-nations-cyberspace-ops-intensified>



Defence Secretary Ash Carter has named new commanders for U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Forces Korea to be confirmed by the Senate. If confirmed, the new Northcom chief will be the first woman to lead a U.S. combatant command. Carter made the announcement on March 18 during an interview by Politico journalists Mike Allen and Bryan Bender. President Barack Obama has approved both choices and will nominate them to the Senate, the secretary said. Air Force Gen. Lori J. Robinson now commands Pacific Air Forces and is air component commander for U.S. Pacific Command.<sup>77</sup>

## International: Asia

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Military leaders are reviewing recommendations on the way forward in Afghanistan; Iraqi security forces detained 149 ISIL fighters; U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq; Joint, interagency and multinational sustainment experts gathered in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; U.S. and Cambodian forces officially opened Angkor Sentinel 2016; Sixth Annual U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD); Subject-matter experts from nine nations in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region came to Andersen Air Force Base for a four-day programme.**

Military leaders are reviewing recommendations on the way forward in Afghanistan before presenting them to President Barack Obama, Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. told the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 17. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said the situation in Afghanistan is challenging. He added that assessments by the current commander in the country -- Army Gen. John W. Nicholson Jr. -- and the previous commander -- Army Gen. John F. Campbell -- are realistic and that the Taliban remain a threat. The chairman told the Senate committee that military officials are examining the lessons learned in 2015 and will apply those to Afghanistan operations in 2016. Dunford, who recently visited Afghanistan, said the mission now is to help Afghan security forces secure their country. There are around 9,800 American troops in the country and another 3,000 coalition troops.<sup>78</sup>

Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren said on March 16 that Iraqi security forces detained 149 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fighters last week as the terrorists tried to blend in with 35,000 civilians fleeing numerous small villages along the Euphrates River Valley. "These cowards are now in [Iraqi forces] custody and will be prosecuted by the Iraqi government," Warren said during his weekly briefing with Pentagon reporters via teleconference from Baghdad. As part of Operation Desert Lynx with help from U.S.-led coalition aircraft, the Iraqi security forces dropped leaflets last week in small villages to

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<sup>77</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter Names First Female Combatant Commander", *DoD News*, March 19, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/697602/carter-names-first-female-combatant-commander>

<sup>78</sup> Garamone, Jim, "Military Reviews Recommendations on Afghanistan for President", *DoD News*, March 17, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/696597/military-reviews-recommendations-on-afghanistan-for-president>

communicate with residents while trying to reduce civilian casualties and weaken ISIL morale, he said.<sup>79</sup>

Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on March 20 that U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Iraq. Rocket artillery, attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 16 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government.<sup>80</sup>

Joint, interagency and multinational sustainment experts gathered on March 14 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, for Angkor Opening 2016, a weeklong exchange and table top exercise that officials said is designed to build partnerships, interoperability and readiness in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief port opening operations. The exercise, hosted by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and sponsored by the U.S. Army's 8th Theatre Sustainment Command and the Cambodian National Committee for Maritime Safety, is the first exchange of its kind between the organizations, officials said. The U.S. contingent of participants includes experts from U.S. Transportation Command, 8th TSC, 130th Theatre Engineer Brigade, 9th Mission Support Command, 593rd Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), 7th Transportation Battalion (Expeditionary), 413th Contracting Support Brigade, Army divers, and a U.S. Navy underwater construction team.<sup>81</sup>

Joint, interagency and multinational sustainment experts gathered in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on March 14 for Angkor Opening 2016, a weeklong exchange and table top exercise designed to build partnerships, interoperability and readiness in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) port opening operations. The exercise, hosted by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and sponsored by the 8th Theatre Sustainment Command and the Cambodian National Committee for Maritime Safety (NCMS), is the first exchange of its kind between the organizations.<sup>82</sup>

U.S. and Cambodian forces officially opened Angkor Sentinel 2016, an annual bilateral military exercise hosted by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and sponsored by the U.S. Army Pacific during a March 14 ceremony at the Training School for Multinational Peacekeeping Forces in Kampong Speu Province, Cambodia. This year marks the seventh iteration of the exercise, which officials said is designed to collectively strengthen the two countries' humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities and improve military-to-military cooperation.<sup>83</sup>

US PACOM reported that Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel and Assistant Secretary of Defence David Shear will lead the Sixth Annual U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD)

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<sup>79</sup> Cronk, Terri Moon, "Iraqi Forces Capture ISIL Fighters Blending In With Fleeing Villagers", *DoD News*, March 16, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/695312/iraqi-forces-capture-isil-fighters-blending-in-with-fleeing-villagers>

<sup>80</sup> "Strikes Hit ISIL in Iraq", *DoD News*, March 20, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/698399/strikes-hit-isil-in-iraq>; and, "Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq", *DoD News*, March 19, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/698331/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-in-syria-iraq>

<sup>81</sup> "Indo-Asian Partners Gather for Port Opening Exercise in Cambodia", By Army Master Sgt. Mary Ferguson, 8th Theater Sustainment Command, *DoD News*, March 16, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/695326/indo-asian-partners-gather-for-port-opening-exercise-in-cambodia>

<sup>82</sup> "Indo-Asian Partners Gather for Inaugural Port Opening Exercise in Cambodia", *US PACOM*, March 15, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/694494/indo-asian-partners-gather-for-inaugural-port-opening-exercise-in-cambodia.aspx>

<sup>83</sup> "U.S., Cambodian Forces Partner for Exercise Angkor Sentinel 2016", By Army Master Sgt. Mary Ferguson, *DoD News*, March 16, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/695255/us-cambodian-forces-partner-for-exercise-angkor-sentinel-2016>

with the Government of the Philippines, led by Department of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Policy Evan Garcia and Department of National Defence Undersecretary for Legal and Strategic Concerns Pio Batino. On the occasion of the BSD, the two sides will reaffirm their commitment to peace, security, and economic prosperity in the Asia Pacific region. Both countries will announce important progress on the implementation of the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) and how the Agreement will support the United States' efforts to help modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines, develop capacity and capability for maritime security and domain awareness, and provide rapid humanitarian assistance and disaster response.<sup>84</sup>

For the first time, subject-matter experts from nine nations in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region came to Andersen Air Force Base for a four-day programme designed to enhance and integrate logistical capabilities. Pacific Agility 16-1, a U.S. Pacific Command multilateral subject-matter expert exchange led by Pacific Air Forces, intends to promote regional stability and build partnerships among nations in the Pacific Theatre. The engagement focused on the importance of contributing to regional security and stability, enhancing logistical interoperability information and developing interpersonal relationships among partner nations. With the Pacific being the largest area of responsibility covering 36 nations, continual growth of partnerships and mutual understanding and trust are vital especially in the event when partner nations are called upon for assistance.<sup>85</sup>

## II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

### Jammu & Kashmir

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **405 incidents of cross border firing in J&K in 2015: MoS Home; Delhi High Court reserves order on plea challenging special status to Jammu & Kashmir; Army to vacate land at four places in J&K; Two Lashkar militants killed, arms seized in Kashmir; Hizbul Mujahideen militant arrested from Kashmir's Budgam district.**

In reply to a written question in Rajya Sabha, Minister of state for home Haribhai Chaudhary informed that 405 incidents of cross border firing had taken place along the India-Pakistan border in Jammu & Kashmir in 2015. As many as 253 incidents of cross border firing had taken place along the International Border and 152 incidents along the Line of Control, said the minister. Altogether 16 civilians were killed, 71 others injured, 72 houses were damaged and as many as 7,110 people (up to November 2015) were temporarily affected due to shelling along the border last year, Haribhai Chaudhary added.<sup>86</sup>

The Delhi High Court, on March 16, reserved its judgement on a plea challenging the constitutional validity of Article 370 of the Constitution that gives special status to Jammu and Kashmir. "File your written submissions. We will consider it and will pass an order," a bench of Chief Justice G Rohini

<sup>84</sup> "U.S.-Philippine Bilateral Strategic Dialogue", *US PACOM*, March 18, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/698177/us-philippine-bilateral-strategic-dialogue.aspx>

<sup>85</sup> "Subject-matter Exchange Enhances Partnerships, Interoperability in Pacific", *US PACOM*, March 18, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/698166/subject-matter-exchange-enhances-partnerships-interoperability-in-pacific.aspx>

<sup>86</sup> "405 Incidents of Cross Border Firing in J&K in 2015", *The Times of India*, March 16, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/405-incidents-of-cross-border-firing-in-JK-in-2015/articleshow/51425159.cms>

and Justice Jayant Nath said. During the brief hearing, the counsel appearing for state of Jammu and Kashmir told the bench that a similar issue was raised before the Supreme Court but it had refused to intervene in it. The counsel claimed that the PIL was "nothing but a politically motivated petition".<sup>87</sup>

The Army will vacate large tracts of land held by it at four places in Jammu and Kashmir by March-end. This is one of the demands by PDP for formation of government with BJP. The decision was announced on March 17 after a meeting between Governor N. N. Vohra and Lt. Gen D. S. Hooda, GOC-in-C Northern Command, during which senior officials including Chief Secretary B R Sharma were present. It was agreed that Northern Command of Army would hand over 16.30 acres of state land held by it adjoining the Campus of Jammu University, 212 acres of land held by it at Tadoo Grounds, Srinagar and 456.60 kanals of land at High Grounds, Anantnag and land held at lower Khurba Thang in Kargil, to J&K government, an official spokesman said. The decision is considered vital in the wake of demands by PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti that Army vacate land it has held and revocation of AFSPA from peaceful areas in Jammu and Kashmir as a confidence building measure ahead of formation of the government in J&K with BJP.<sup>88</sup>

Two militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in north Kashmir's Handwara district on March 18. "Acting on specific information about the presence of terrorists, the Handwara police assisted by the Army's 21 RR started cordon-and-search operation in Waderbala area. The terrorists then fired at the joint party of police and security forces. The fire was retaliated and an encounter ensued," said the police spokesman. Two AK 47 rifles, 06 AK magazines, 04 UBGL, 46 AK rounds, radio sets and maps were recovered from the encounter site, according to the police. "From the seized material, it appears that the terrorists belonged to the Lashkar-e-Taiba," said Ghulam Jeelani, SP, Handwara.<sup>89</sup>

Abdul Hamid Nath, a militant of Hizbul Mujahideen, was apprehended from Ratsuna village in Beerwah area of central Kashmir's Budgam district by a joint party of police, army and CRPF on March 18, a police official said. One AK rifle, two magazines, 84 rounds and a hand grenade were seized from his possession, he added.<sup>90</sup>

## Northeast India

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **Don't politicize secret killings: Ulfa; Militants sent on pre-poll terror mission in Assam desert outfits: Assam Police; Two NDFB (S) militants killed in Assam; Three NSCN cadres arrested in Arunachal Pradesh; Kangleipak Communist Party militant held in Manipur.**

<sup>87</sup> "Delhi HC Reserves Order On Plea Challenging Special Status to J&K", *Rising Kashmir*, March 16, 2016 at <http://risingkashmir.com/news/delhi-hc-reserves-order-on-plea-challenging-special-status-to-jk/>

<sup>88</sup> "Indian Army To Vacate Land at Four Places in J&K", *The Hindu*, March 18, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indian-army-to-vacate-land-at-four-places-in-jk/article8371033.ece>

<sup>89</sup> Ashiq, Peerzada, "Two Lashkar Men Killed, Arms Seized in Kashmir", *The Hindu*, March 19, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/two-lashkar-men-killed-arms-seized-in-kashmir/article8371423.ece>

<sup>90</sup> "Hizbul Mujahideen Militant Arrested From Kashmir's Budgam District", *The Economic Times*, March 19, 2016 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/hizbul-mujahideen-militant-arrested-from-kashmirs-budgam-district/articleshow/51471311.cms>

The United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), on March 13, appealed to all political parties in Assam to refrain from making the secret killings of the family members of several Ulfa leaders, between 1998 and 2000 in the state, as an election issue. The outfit's general secretary Anup Chetia said, "CM Tarun Gogoi recently said Congress would make the secret killings an election issue. If it (Congress) was so committed to resolving the issue, why didn't it try to nab a single killer and bring justice to those families who lost their near and dear ones in the last 15 years. We do not wish to see this (secret killings) as an election issue and I appeal to all political parties not to politicize this subject." He said, "We have decided not to support any party. Our general council will be meeting shortly to decide whether we will vote or not."<sup>91</sup>

Members of some Northeast militant outfits, sent on a pre-assembly election terror mission from their bases in Myanmar, have seized the opportunity to desert their extremist organisations. Assam Police officials said an unspecified group of militants belonging to four armed outlawed groups had on March 8 entered a reserved forest in eastern Assam to unleash terror. But five of them chose to desert. Two each belonged to ULFA-I and People's Liberation Army (PLA) and one to Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL). PLA and KYKL, both Manipur-based, are associates of the United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia, which was formed by ULFA-I and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K). While the two ULFA-I members have approached the armed forces, the PLA and KYKL deserters have not been traced, the spokesperson said.<sup>92</sup>

Two NDFB (Songbijit) militants were killed in an encounter with police at Hatipota village in Udalguri district of Assam on March 16. Following the encounter, the police recovered two 7.65 mm pistols, two 7.65 mm magazines, four 7.65 mm ammunition, five empty cases of 7.65 mm ammunition and four 9 mm empty cases, besides one SIM card from the spot.<sup>93</sup>

Naga outfits operating from the soils of eastern Arunachal Pradesh suffered a setback with the security forces nabbing three hardcore cadres of NSCN – including two from Isak Muivah faction and another from Unification group – in two different incidents in Tirap district on March 10. The security forces also recovered a huge cache of arms and ammunition from the arrested cadres, official sources said. Giving details, the sources said the Assam Rifles personnel of Khonsa conducted a search operation in Lothang village that led to arrest of one cadre of NSCN (IM) from adjoining jhoom field (shifting cultivation). Later, on his tip-off, another accomplice was apprehended from jungle area. One 7.62mm AK 47 rifle, one 7.65 mm automatic pistol, grenades, explosives, detonators and a huge quantity of ammunition were recovered from their possession. The security forces, meanwhile, arrested an NSCN (U) cadre from Borduria area of Tirap district after an intense search operation for more than 24 hours. They also recovered a .303 rifle, 16 live rounds and 78 rounds of AK 47 from his possession, the sources said.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Kalita, Prabin, "Don't Politicize Secret Killings: Ulfa", *The Times of India*, March 14, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Dont-politicize-secret-killings-Ulfa/articleshow/51389352.cms>

<sup>92</sup> Karmakar, Rahul, "Militants Sent On Pre-Poll Terror Mission in Assam Desert Outfit", *Hindustan Times*, March 15, 2016 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/militants-sent-on-pre-poll-terror-mission-in-assam-desert-outfit/story-oy7yx1SZUPkJQFeMYMwZVL.html>

<sup>93</sup> "Two NDFB(S) Militants Killed in Assam", *Business Standard*, March 16, 2016 at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/two-ndfb-s-militants-killed-in-assam-116031600260\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/two-ndfb-s-militants-killed-in-assam-116031600260_1.html)

<sup>94</sup> "3 NSCN Cadres Nabbed in Arunachal", *The Assam Tribune*, March 20, 2016 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar2016/oth055>



An activist of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (Mangal) was apprehended by a team of Manipur Police from Uripok locality in Imphal West district, police said on March 19. The 29-year-old militant has been identified as Paonam Abung Singh. He was allegedly involved in extortion, illegal transportation of arms and ammunition for the outfit, police said.<sup>95</sup>

## Left-wing Extremism

(March 14-20, 2016)

- **117 'Maoists' surrender in Odisha; Government to work in 'mission mode' to address Naxalism; Two CRPF jawans injured in Maoist violence in Chhattisgarh.**

Adding to the continuing spree of surrenders in Malkangiri district in Odisha, one hundred and seventeen persons with Maoist links, including 36 militias, surrendered before Malkangiri Superintendent of Police on March 14. Those who surrendered included Maoist militia commander Madhab Durua and Moga Sodi, the village committee president of the Naxalites in the area. All these persons were actively involved in violent activities of the Darbha division of the outlawed CPI (Maoist), said Malkangiri SP Mitrabhanu Mohapatra. With this, the total number of surrenders of Maoist elements in the district has risen over 400 during past ten days.<sup>96</sup>

The Central government, on March 15, told Lok Sabha that it would work in a "mission mode" to end Naxalism while noting that the casualties in the extremist violence had come down substantially. Home Minister Rajnath Singh said the multi-pronged strategy being implemented by the Centre is helping in addressing the problem and maximum possible assistance is being provided to the affected states. Insisting that the government strategy is showing results, Rajnath Singh said the number of deaths of civilians and security personnel due to Naxal and Maoist activities came down last year to 226 compared to 1,005 in 2010. In 2015, 168 civilians and 58 security personnel were killed whereas 720 civilians and 285 security personnel died in 2010, Singh added.<sup>97</sup>

Two Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans were injured in separate incidents in Chhattisgarh's Maoist-hit Dantewada district on March 18, police said. A CoBRA jawan was injured when a pressure bomb laid by Maoists blasted in Badegurra forest of Kuwakonda police station limits on March 18, Dantewada superintendent of police Kamlochan Kashyap told PTI. Another CRPF jawan sustained injuries after he was shot with an arrow by Maoists in Chikpal forest under Katekalyan police station limits on March 17 night, the SP added.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> "Militant Held", *The Assam Tribune*, March 20, 2016 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar2016/oth058>

<sup>96</sup> "117 'Maoists' Surrender", *The Hindu*, March 15, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/117-maoists-surrender/article8353730.ece>

<sup>97</sup> "Government To Work in 'Mission Mode' To Address Naxalism", *The Economic Times*, March 15, 2016 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/government-to-work-in-mission-mode-to-address-naxalism/articleshow/51408749.cms>

<sup>98</sup> "Chhattisgarh: Two CRPF Jawans Injured in Separate Maoist Violence", *Hindustan Times*, March 18, 2016 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/chhattisgarh-two-crpf-jawans-injured-in-separate-maoist-attacks/story-sG8s8Rxy9t6JrYZJ0yaRcO.html>