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China 70th Anniversary Military Parade

On 1 October 2019, the People's Republic of China celebrated the 70th anniversary of its founding with a military parade that showcased its technological prowess and military capabilities. 40 per cent of the weaponry displayed is said to be new and everything has been claimed as domestically manufactured. Among the weapons and equipment displayed were:

- 99A -- the new generation main battle tank.
- Dong Feng (DF) -17 : the new medium range ballistic missile (MRBM), which can travel at hypersonic speed (above Mach 5) and is capable of penetrating anti-missile shields such as America's ship-based SM-3 or ground based systems such as Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD). With a range of between 1800 and 2500 km, the missile can reach South Korea and Japan. And, if placed in Tibet, it can reach targets in India and beat missile defence systems such as the S-400 that India has agreed to buy from Russia.
- DG-100: the new supersonic cruise missile that could be used for neutralising aircraft carriers.
- YJ-18: an anti-ship and land attack cruise missile, which has a subsonic cruise mode and a supersonic terminal attack mode, and a range of 540 km.
- DF-41: an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a range of about 15,000 km and capable of striking the United States within 30 minutes.
- JL-2: a submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) that assures second strike capability and sea-based nuclear deterrence.
- WZ-8 – a supersonic drone that can be deployed by aircraft to carry out reconnaissance.
- Anti-terrorist assault vehicles and armoured anti-riot vehicles.

Protests in Hong Kong

The firing of a live round by the police on 1 October 2019 into the chest of 18 year-old Tsang Chi-kin, who was attacking a police official, was the most violent incident that Hong Kong has seen since June 2019 when mass protests erupted against the proposed Extradition Bill. Though the bill has been withdrawn, protests continue unabated. To be fair to the Hong Kong authorities and police, they have demonstrated remarkable restraint in dealing with the situation. Protest demonstrations by lakhs of people have been chronic since the United Kingdom

handed Hong Kong over to the People's Republic of China. While the police have used force, they have not killed or brutalised protestors. Police restraint could be attributed in part to professionalism but also to the realisation that, if the situation were to worsen, it would invite the PLA's or the PLA Armed Police's intervention – a possibility that both the authorities and protestors fear. The protestors have made the following demands:

1. Withdraw the draft legislation, which has already been done.
2. Hold an inquiry to investigate police conduct during the demonstrations.
3. Restart the city's stalled political reform process.
4. Grant amnesty to those arrested.
5. Stop characterising the protests as riots.

The larger point is that as Hong Kong moves towards 2047 with no clear guarantee as to what would happen to the One Country, Two Systems after that date, anxiety will only increase about its fate – a situation that promises recurring protests and even violence.

South China Sea: Tensions Between China and Vietnam



Since it officially claimed some 90 per cent of the South China Sea in 2009, China has been regularly asserting its “sovereign rights” in these waters by, among other measures, deliberately sending survey vessels into the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of other states in the region. The latest incident in this regard took place in Vietnamese waters, near where ONGC Videsh is engaged in oil and gas exploration. The Chinese survey vessel Haiyang Dizhi first entered Vietnam's EEZ and stayed near the gas field, in which ONGC Videsh is a partner, from July to August 7. It returned on August 13, this time supported by two Chinese Coast Guard Ships and fighter aircraft. Since the beginning of this year, 28 Chinese ships have entered the Vietnamese EEZ. The tension between Vietnam and China in the region is associated with potential hydrocarbon deposits worth US\$ 2.5 trillion.

Vietnam's Ambassador to India has said that his government plans to discuss Chinese intrusions with India at an Annual Security Conference that is scheduled for later this month in Ho Chi Minh City.

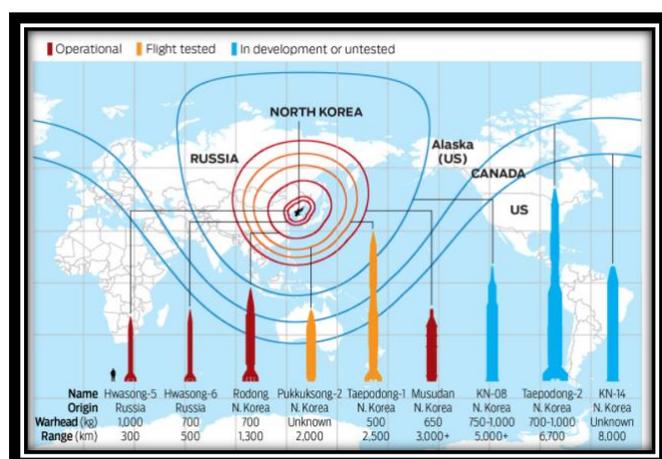
India has deepened defence and security cooperation with Vietnam during the last several years. Their navies have institutionalised mechanisms for cooperation, which include Staff Talks, bilateral exercises, and training in niche areas such as aviation and submarines. In addition, India has been providing spares and repair assistance to Vietnam's Russian-origin naval assets.

ASEAN-United States Maritime Exercise, 2019

ASEAN countries conducted a joint military exercise with the United States between 2 and 6 September 2019. This is the first time that ASEAN as a group has participated in a military exercise with the United States. The ASEAN-US maritime exercise or the AUMX 2019 began in the Gulf of Thailand and concluded five days later in Singapore.

ASEAN participated in a similar military exercise with China in October 2018. But a code of conduct that outlines the norms and rules of proper state conduct remains elusive given China's determination to transform the South China Sea into a Chinese lake. In the process, China has also succeeded in fracturing ASEAN consensus by dealing with the countries of the region bilaterally.

North Korea Submarine Missile Test



North Korea tested the Pukgukson-3, a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) from an underwater platform (but not a submarine) on 1 October 2019. The missile flew 450 km at a lofted trajectory of 910 km. At standard trajectory, the range would have been up to 1,900 km. The missile reportedly landed within Japan's EEZ. North Korea began testing

submarine-launched ballistic missiles in 2015.

The likely naval platforms into which the missile may be integrated with is the Romeo-class submarines built in the 1990s. With a range of about 7,000 km, these submarines could potentially make a one-way trip to the vicinities of the US territory of Hawaii.

Japan's Annual Defence White Paper, 2019

On 27 September, Japan's Ministry of Defense issued its annual White Paper titled, *Defense of Japan 2019*. This is the first defence white paper following the revision of the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) and the formulation of the Mid-Term Defense Program in December 2018. It has underscored the need for Japan to 'face the realities of national security' and focus on 'quality and quantity' while building new defence capability. The US-Japan alliance will continue to remain as the core component of Japan's security policy. In addition to the fluid regional situation, the White Paper focuses on new domains such as space, cyber, and electromagnetic waves and demands reorientation of the traditional focus on the land, sea, and air domains. While the latest White Paper has characterised Japan's security concerns about China as "serious", the previous version had used the word "strong" in this regard. Japan's concerns centre on China's coercive attempts to alter the status quo, dilute the rules-based maritime order, the PLA's anti-access/area denial capabilities, and the strategic component of the Belt and Road Initiative. The White Paper's threat assessment vis-à-vis North Korea has remained unchanged from the previous year – serious and imminent. Aligning Japan's 'Proactive Contribution to Peace' and its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision', the White Paper underscores the significance of cultivating multifaceted and multi-layered defence cooperation with Australia, India, and ASEAN countries. But due to deteriorating relations with South Korea over the history issue, the White Paper has downgraded its significance in the Japanese scheme of things.

Japan's Defence Budget for FY 2020

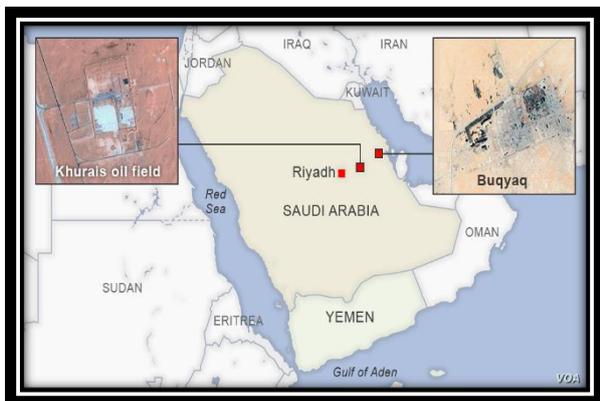
On 30 August 2019, Japan's Ministry of Defence proposed a defence budget of JP¥ 5.32 trillion or around US\$ 50 billion for FY 2020, with special focus on the three new domains of cyber, space, and electronic warfare (EW). The proposed budget represents a 1.2 per cent increase from the previous budget. It will be analysed by the Ministry of Finance prior to approval by the Cabinet towards the end of this year. If approved in its entirety, this would be the eighth straight year of increase in the defence budget. This is the first defence budget proposal following the 2018 Mid-Term Defense Program (MTDP), which projected an expenditure of JP¥ 27.47 trillion (US\$ 242.7 billion) on the Self-Defense Forces (SDF). In keeping with the priorities identified in the 2018 NDPG, the Ministry of Defense has requested ¥52.4 billion to reinforce Japan's space capabilities, ¥23.8 billion for strengthening cyber security, ¥20.7 billion for developing a stand-off electronic warfare aircraft for jamming enemy equipment, besides ¥3.1 billion for upgrading the Izumo-class helicopter destroyer into an aircraft carrier and ¥84.6 billion to purchase six F-35B fighter jets for use on the Izumo.

Drone and Missile Attack on Saudi Oil Facilities

On 14 September 2019, two key oil processing facilities in Saudi Arabia - Abqaiq and Khurais – were attacked with drones and cruise missiles, respectively. Around 50 per cent of Saudi oil production was affected by the attacks, leading to an immediate increase in crude oil prices. The damage is estimated to take weeks to rectify.

The attack reportedly involved about 25 Kamikaze (sacrificial) vectors comprising 18 Drones and seven cruise missiles. Such a massive drone attack on installations located deep inside Saudi territory that too after penetrating its modern US-aided air defence set-up was unimaginable until it happened. Such an intricate operation involving the routing of drones through air defence cover and precision targeting needs vast intelligence and points to military expertise that only states have.

The type of drones reportedly used was the UAV-X – a propeller driven fixed wing craft with the length of a sedan, speed of up to 250 kmph, range of 1500 km and carrying an 18 kg explosive warhead. The likely flight profile in which drones flew avoiding detection by Saudi radars and the accuracy with which they struck the precise points on the targets indicate the use of sophisticated technology for autonomous navigation and attacking targets. The final homing onto targets may have been through GPS coordinates coupled with Imaging Infra-Red sensing. The success of the attack opens a Pandora's Box requiring a new look at the threat paradigm.



An alarmist view should, however, not be taken in this regard given that drones do have technological limitations. Drones, or Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA), of all types are controlled by a remote operator through a Data Link from a Control Terminal. In most cases, the Drone needs to be in the range of the Data Link by remaining in 'line of sight' of the Control Terminal. This

may be obviated in two cases: when the Data Link is established through a satellite, or the Drone is pre-programmed to fly a route. The limitation to remaining in 'Line of Sight' is the 'control range'. Therefore, assuming the maximum ceiling height of the Drone as 30,000 feet, its normal range would be between 150 and 200 km from its Control Terminal.

Saudi Arabia has alleged that Iran may have carried out this attack. Some observers have speculated that the attack originated from the Iran-Iraq border region. However, the closest points from the oil facilities to the Iranian coast is

260 km, the Iraqi border is 460 km, and the Yemeni border is 800 km. Further, the Drones were allegedly flying low for the attack, which geometrically reduces the control range to within 100 km.

Establishing Satellite Data Link with Drones is a fairly advanced technology that is available with only a handful of countries. Iran's space programme has not yet matured as indicated by the three launch failures this year alone, and it does not operate a functional military satellite. For similar reasons to do with technological proficiency, an accurate attack by pre-programmed Drones over long distances seems highly unlikely. Therefore, the only likely explanation is that the Drones were either launched from outside but controlled from within Saudi territory, or they were both launched and controlled from within Saudi Arabia.

Houthis Claim Capture of Saudi Forces

On 26 September 2019, Iran-backed Houthi rebels — who belong to the Zaydi Shiite sect and are fighting Saudi-led coalition forces in Yemen since 2015 — claimed to have invaded the Saudi border province of Najran and captured “thousands” of “enemy troops”, including several Saudi army officers. For their part, the Saudi-UAE-led military coalition has rejected the Houthi claim as a “misleading media campaign”. The significance of the Houthi claim lies in the fact that Najran province has a majority Ismaili Shiite population, which has been complaining about repressive Saudi policies since the mid-1990s.