



## EDITOR'S NOTE

The most talked about event in the last few months has been the inauguration of President Trump. An uncertain course of events is forecast, and the world, and the USA itself, are apprehensive that, both internally and externally, the existing order could undergo a major change. The direction of such change is still unknown but few believe that the status quo will be maintained. On the other hand, China continues on its way to become increasingly stronger and more influential in world affairs. We are also witnessing an increasing coming together of Russia, China and Pakistan. What the future holds is indeed uncertain, may be even uniquely novel, and our journal will continue to address issues that should be of interest to our readers.

China's meteoric rise is bound to impact its bilateral and multilateral relations. China began to flex its muscles in 2008 or so after the financial crisis in the belief that the USA's power was fallible. With increased economic and military power, the Chinese propensity grew towards assertiveness, brinksmanship, greater confidence, an aggressive approach and willingness to offer challenges. For India, the next few years will be crucial as they will determine the effect on our security and our place in the world. We are less important to China in its global calculus but we are not unimportant. China has not been reticent in attempting to rile India and its recent attempts to solve our border issues on its terms by asking us to give major concessions in the Tawang area are indicative of the trend. Similarly, the invitation by some Chinese authorities for us to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has implications that we must eschew. Its assertions that the South of China Sea is its lake, the movement of its submarines in the Indian Ocean and similar activities, and its unqualified support for Pakistan in every way

will continue to concern us. In time, it is not unlikely that China will try and claim parts of India on the 'historical' basis which will be little more than an attempt at cartographic aggression. All these issues and many more are discussed by **Jayadeva Ranade** in the lead article in this issue.

The award by the Permanent Court of Arbitration unequivocally stating that China had no basis to claim the area within the '9-dash line' in the South of China Sea saw an outright rejection by China. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), of which China is a member, clearly suggests that maritime rights are based on land and not convenient history lessons. Even a cursory look will show that China has no case. Many countries claim some island or the other in the area, particularly in the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands and Scarborough Shoal. Many of these islands are mere small land masses, little more than rocks, but they command substantial Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). The Chinese claim, creation of islands and their militarisation represents a unilateral exercise of power. Other nations are also upgrading their defences. Could this entire brinksmanship lead to a conflict? Will the US reinforce military forces in the area and categorically assert its policy towards the region? These are important questions with no clear answers at present. **Air Mshl Dhiraj Kukreja** traces the history of the region and gives his views on what could transpire.

The internet is now a very important part of our lives and impacts the commercial, civil and military fields. However, it is not an unmixed blessing. It is a man-made global commons and susceptible to interference. Cyber space is gaining significance and cyber war is on the cards. How cyber war will pan out is uncertain but there have been instances in the past that indicate the possible debilitating impact of cyber war. All countries are becoming increasingly aware of the possible dangers and see the need for prior preparation. In the military sphere, cyber attacks represent the 'first day' weapons and could be used independently or in combination with elements of kinetic war. **Gp Capt Ashish Gupta** examines the frontierless world and the attempts being made to exercise sovereign rights over own part of cyber space.

Russia may have lost ground from the heyday of the Soviet Union but

it remains a major power, with great potential to rise again. Possibly the critical factor is the economy. **Professor Arun Mohanty** looks at the not so distant trends and what the future holds. Recent Russian history has been characterised by difficulties, crises, and economic downturn as a result of sanctions and fall in oil prices. The ill-advised policies of President Boris Yeltsin resulted in halving of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and near bankruptcy in 1998. President Putin started the reform process and, with the benefit of high oil prices, managed the economy well enough for the GDP to rise to become the 7th highest in the world. The financial crisis of 2008 heralded another downturn and a fresh approach was adopted. Stringent economic sanctions were to follow the annexation of Crimea. It now appears that the dangers have been averted. Russia is rich in resources, and oil prices have seen a rebound. Most importantly, the Russians are inured to hardships and have all along taken crises in their stride.

Our geographical area is prone to unfortunate occurrences and natural calamities that necessitate rapid rescue and provision of succour. With experience, we have learnt many lessons and it behoves us to adopt better systems and hone our efficiency. Debriefs and a rehash of what went right or wrong happens regularly. There have been many instances of the use of innovation, inventiveness, improvisation and the exercise of initiative. All eventualities cannot be forecast as each case is unique. **Air Vice Mshl Rajesh Isser** is a respected veteran in providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. He opines that in spite of the pulls and pressures, maintenance of records is an inescapable necessity. He recognises that people behave differently and psychological issues play a part. In a study that is well researched and, at times, theoretical, the author has explained what can and should be done to advantage. Some terms used like 'swift trust', 'crisis informatics' and 'swarm intelligence' are intriguing.

Both China and Iran have in the past suffered at the hands of the West. That factor by itself has created an affinity for each other and spawned mutually beneficial endeavours. To strengthen the relationship, Iran has oil that China needs, and Iran welcomes Chinese arms and defence cooperation. With sanctions being lifted as a result of the Iran nuclear deal, the bilateral

engagement is likely to increase substantially. Geopolitics also plays a part and so does the overriding presence of the US in the area. **Ms Anu Sharma** recounts the history since diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in 1971, and analyses the economic, political and diplomatic relations. The possible approach by China to have Iran as a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is discussed and so are the implications for India.

The last article in this issue of the journal is by **Professor Amarjit Singh** of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, USA. The author tries to answer the question of what it is that the USA wants in the Middle East. The views expressed are uniquely personal. He opines that the USA has had a hidden agenda and argues as to why they supported the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), starting from the release of Al Baghdadi from Guantanamo in 2004. The article is well researched and very readable. It aims to explain the conundrum that is the Middle East and forecasts what a new map of the Middle East could look like. Some readers may not agree with his hypothesis but no one can ignore the scholarship and commitment of the author.

Happy reading.

