

Headlines:

- **Al Qaeda Struggle to Remain Relevant**
- **Macron takes first round victory in France**
- **US Mission Creep in Afghanistan**

Details:

Al Qaeda Struggle to Remain Relevant

Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has called on the armed Syrian opposition to wage guerrilla warfare against the government of Bashar al-Assad and its allies. In an audio tape titled "Syria will only bow to God," released on the internet on Sunday, Zawahiri urged Syrian rebels to "have patience and prepare themselves for a long war against the Crusaders and their Shia allies". Al-Qaeda have been absent from the global scene shortly after the emergence of ISIL, with its absence in Syria signalled by the severing of ties by the Al Nusra Front in July 2016. "Certainly with the ISIS being the star, if you will, in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, al-Qaeda is trying to be relevant at a time when it is no longer relevant," stated Marwan Bishara a senior analyst. It is also worth noting that the Al-Qaeda leadership has become decentralised over the past decade with smaller groups of affiliations in Yemen, Pakistan etc acting with autonomy and that this address is aimed at presenting a structured leadership rather than a fragmented group.

Macron takes first round victory in France

Macron, who leads the centralist "En Marche!" defeated right wing candidate Marie Le Pen in the first round of voting in the French general election. Le Pen has thus managed to stoke up the sentiments of right leaning personalities in France and in line with the anti-immigration atmosphere engulfing Europe she has also been seen as advocating "divisive" politics. However in this encounter it is the young Macron who won. Whilst both candidates have been presented as wide apart in their opinions and vision for the country it remains clear that those things that matter, including French foreign policy and the treatment of minorities such as Muslims remains constant.

US Mission Creep in Afghanistan

The Taliban carried its largest attack since the US invaded Afghanistan 16 years ago. The attack on the 209th Corps in Balkh Province began around 1 pm, in a crowded area of soldiers. A Western military official in Kabul, said the number of deaths could reach 70 or more. Zabiullah Kaker, a member of the Balkh provincial council, said people inside the army corps had told him that at least 66 soldiers were killed in the attack and that 74 were wounded. The attack forced the resignations of the country's defense minister and army chief on Monday 24th as Defense Secretary Jim Mattis arrived in a surprise visit to survey the deteriorating situation. The Taliban, which is contesting control of one-third of Afghanistan, has continued to steadily gain territory and inflict record casualties on civilians and troops since most NATO troops withdrew from the country in 2014. With the conflict at a stalemate and no sign that peace talks will resume after several years of failed attempts, it is far from clear whether the Trump administration will decide to make a significant contribution in troops and money. There are growing doubts about the ability to defend against major Taliban attacks and this attack by the Taliban just adds to those doubts.