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Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

November 15

Biden and Xi Make Progress in Talks, Agree to Military Contacts and Fentanyl Control



In a significant diplomatic breakthrough, U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping concluded a four-hour face-to-face meeting outside San Francisco, marking their first in-person talks in a year. The leaders agreed to establish a presidential hotline, resume military-to-military communications, and collaborate on curbing fentanyl production. Notable advancements include plans to renew military contacts severed by China after a Pelosi-led visit to Taiwan. While challenges persist, particularly regarding Taiwan, the leaders emphasized direct communication to avoid misunderstandings. Biden confirmed that he and Xi can directly call each other, but he maintained his view that Xi is a dictator. The talks also addressed concerns about detained U.S. citizens, human rights, and China's activities in the South China Sea. Despite differences, the leaders expressed a commitment to manage their relationship responsibly and ensure healthy competition.

November 13

Ethnic Chin Rebels Escalate Assault on Myanmar Junta in Widening Frontline Struggle

In a mounting nationwide offensive against Myanmar's junta, ethnic Chin rebels launched an assault on a military camp in remote Chin State. The Khawmawi military camp near the India-Myanmar border was attacked, lasting almost 12 hours. Rebels, using drones, claimed to drop bombs on the bases, with junta soldiers fighting back fiercely. The rebels' "Operation 1027" has opened multiple fronts against the junta, marking the most significant challenge since the coup. The Arakan Army, an ally of the Chin rebels, has opened a front in Western Rakhine State. Myanmar's military acknowledges facing "heavy assaults" and labels the insurgents as "terrorists."

November 16

Six Nations, Including Canada and Germany, Join Genocide Case Against Myanmar at The Hague

Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Britain have collectively intervened in the genocide case against Myanmar over its treatment of the Rohingya Muslim minority at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Focusing on preventing and punishing genocide, the nations cited a "common interest in the accomplishment of the high purposes of the Convention." The joint intervention highlights a particular focus on violence against women and children. Myanmar, which has denied genocide allegations, faces proceedings initiated by the United Nations.

November 17

Philippine President Seeks De-escalation in South China Sea Talks with Xi Jinping



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. engaged in talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the APEC Summit, aiming to ease tensions in the South China Sea and restore Filipino fishermen's access. Stressing the importance of continuous communication for regional peace, Marcos expressed concerns about incidents at sea and called for a return to cooperative fishing practices. Emphasizing that geopolitical issues should not define bilateral relations, Marcos highlighted the shared goal of avoiding conflict. Since taking office in 2022, Marcos has pursued warmer ties with the U.S., a move that has drawn objections from Beijing.

U.S. Approves Potential \$2.35 Billion Sale of Tomahawk Missiles to Japan

The U.S. State Department has given its nod for a potential sale of 400 Tomahawk missiles and related equipment to Japan, valued at \$2.35 billion, according to the Pentagon. The approved package includes missiles, Tactical Tomahawk Weapon Control Systems, software, support equipment, spares, and technical support. While this approval signals a significant step, it doesn't confirm a signed contract or finalized negotiations. Raytheon is named as the principal contractor for the weapons in the potential deal.

November 21

North Korea Launches First Spy Satellite, Defying Global Condemnation

North Korea declared the successful launch of its first spy satellite, Malligyong-1, into orbit, vowing more launches despite international condemnation. The U.S. called it a "brazen violation" of U.N. resolutions, highlighting the use of banned ballistic missile technology. North Korea's space agency plans more satellites for surveillance capabilities. Japan issued an emergency warning, urging residents to take cover before deeming the rocket non-threatening.

Philippines and US Launch Joint South China Sea Patrols Amid Rising Tensions

The Philippines and the United States commence joint air and maritime patrols near Taiwan, escalating tensions with China. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. calls it a "significant initiative" to enhance interoperability. The exercise, involving navy vessels and aircraft, starts near Taiwan's Mavulis island and concludes in the South China Sea. The move signals the Philippines' heightened defense stance against perceived Chinese aggression. China warns against actions that could escalate tensions, while the joint patrol demonstrates Manila's firm position on South China Sea issues.

Rohingya Arrivals in Indonesia Exceed 1,000 in a Week



Over 200 ethnic Rohingya, including women and children, arrived in Indonesia's Aceh province, bringing the total Rohingya arrivals to over 1,000 this week. Persecuted Rohingya often leave Myanmar on precarious boats during calmer seas from November to April, seeking refuge in neighboring countries. The reason for the recent surge is unclear, but the UN refugee agency emphasizes their quest for a safer life. While Aceh villagers attempted to prevent Rohingya arrivals last week, Amnesty International Indonesia urges authorities to address the crisis and engage with neighboring nations like Malaysia and Thailand. Indonesia's Foreign Ministry states it lacks the capacity to accommodate Rohingya refugees.

November 22

Fiji Likely to Collaborate with China on Key Port Project

Fiji's Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, announced potential collaboration with China on a crucial port modernization and shipyard project. Fiji had previously sought Australia's involvement. Rabuka, in discussions with Chinese President Xi Jinping, expressed the nation's focus on upgrading infrastructure, highlighting potential collaboration with China due to its competitive shipbuilding capabilities. The move comes amid concerns over China's naval expansion in the Pacific. Fiji's external debt crisis is also being addressed in talks with China. Australia had funded a feasibility study for a shipyard project in Lautoka, but Rabuka's recent remarks suggest potential Chinese involvement.

November 24

Afghanistan Shuts Embassy in New Delhi Amid Visa Extension Challenges

Afghanistan's embassy in New Delhi has closed as diplomats, appointed by the ousted Afghan government, failed to secure visa extensions from India. The embassy cited pressure from both the Indian government and the Taliban for the decision.

Kim Jong Un Inspects Satellite Images of Target Regions



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un examined photos captured by the country's new spy satellite, focusing on "major target regions" such as Seoul and cities hosting U.S. military bases. Launched on November 21, the satellite's capabilities remain unverified. Kim visited the control center of the National Aerospace Technology Administration to assess images of South Korean cities and U.S. military installations, including the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson in Busan. Amidst global condemnation, North Korea warned of catastrophic consequences if the U.S. continued arming its "puppets," emphasizing the potential for a nuclear war sparked by even a small incident on the Korean peninsula.

November 25

China Conducts Drills Along Its Myanmar Border



China's military announces "combat training activities" along its Myanmar border following a truck convoy fire labeled an insurgent attack by Myanmar state media. In response to rare strain in bilateral ties, Chinese envoys had discussed border stability with Myanmar officials. The training, focusing on rapid maneuverability and border sealing, aims to test theatre troops' capabilities, according to the Southern Theatre Command. Yunnan province, bordering Myanmar, will host drills until Nov. 28. Myanmar's junta spokesman assures the exercises aim to "maintain stability and peace" near the border, emphasizing China's non-interference policy. The announcement follows Myanmar's struggle against a coordinated offensive, displacing over 2 million people.

Philippines and Australia Launch Joint South China Sea Patrols Amid Regional Tensions



The Philippines and Australia initiate their first joint sea and air patrols in the South China Sea, following similar moves with the U.S. The three-day exercises, announced by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, underscore their commitment to a rules-based order amid concerns over an assertive China. The patrols aim to address China's claims over the strategically vital region, where tensions between China and the U.S. persist. Australia's Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles emphasizes their commitment to a peaceful and secure region in a joint statement with Marcos.

China alleges that the Philippines has engaged "foreign forces" to conduct patrols in the South China Sea, accusing Manila of causing disturbances. The Philippines maintains that its maritime activities fall within its legitimate rights.

China, US Trade Accusations Over South China Sea Incident

China and the U.S. trade accusations after a reported encounter in the South China Sea. China claims to have driven away a U.S. warship, while the U.S. Navy asserts it was conducting a routine freedom of navigation operation near the Paracel Islands. The incident adds strain to ongoing territorial disputes.

November 26

Asian Foreign Ministers Seek Cooperation Revival in Trilateral Meeting



Foreign ministers from South Korea, China, and Japan convened in Busan to rejuvenate regional collaboration and pave the way for a trilateral summit. While China and the U.S. work on repairing ties, Beijing is wary of the strengthening partnership between Washington and its key regional allies. Bilateral disputes and the COVID-19 pandemic have hindered the annual summits agreed upon since 2008. The meeting, the first since 2019, aims to break the deadlock. Prior to the summit, South Korean and Japanese ministers condemned North Korea's satellite launch, while addressing historical issues brought tension. Despite challenges, leaders aim to foster diplomatic and economic exchanges.

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