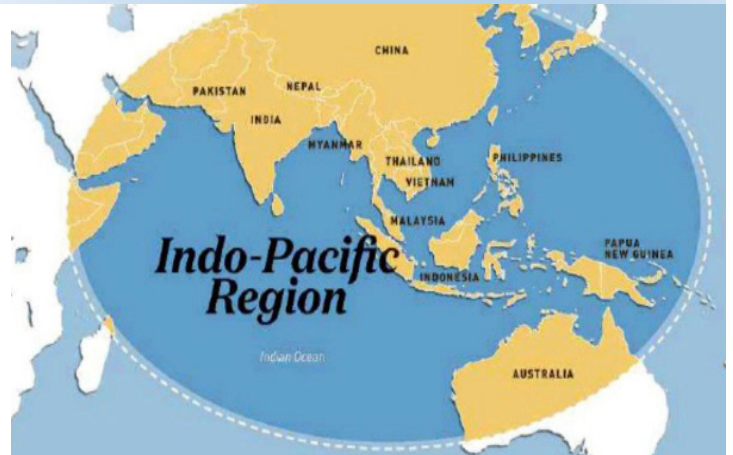




CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

INDO-PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



A Monthly Newsletter on Security and Strategic Issues on Indo-Pacific Region from Centre for Air Power Studies

From the Editor's Desk

This month witnessed several important summits such as the US-China Summit, China-Japan and China-Australia summit which also marked ease of tensions. The 10th ADMM Plus Meeting and the 17th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting took place in Jakarta on November 15–16, but no significant joint statements came from them.

Throughout the month, India furthered the development of its defense, security, and diplomatic ties with the US and Australia, two of its main Indo-Pacific allies.

November 10 was the date of the 5th India-US 2+2 Ministerial Meeting, and November 20 was the date of the 2nd India-Australia 2+2 in New Delhi. On November 26, the foreign ministers of China, Japan, and South Korea convened in Busan for a productive trilateral meeting that cleared the path for potential summit talks between the three nations in the upcoming months.

The Philippines ended three large-scale infrastructure projects with China and strengthened defense ties with the US, Australia, and Japan as it moved closer to the US and its allies. Japan became Vietnam's sixth all-encompassing strategic partner during the November 27–30 visit of Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong to Tokyo.

This month we present specially selected opinions and cherry picks covering all this and more. Do check out our Social Media Corner for some engaging and insightful content, including debates, interviews and podcasts from eminent experts.

Jai Hind

Vol III, No 07, 07 December 2023

CONTENTS

- From the Editor's Desk
- Opinion/ Review/ Expert View
- Social Media Corner

PEEP-IN

Why Negotiating with China Feels Different

Read more about it at :-

<https://merics.org/en/comment/why-negotiating-china-feels-different>

QUOTE

“Quad has made enormous progress in the last few years. There is an inclination to push the envelope to find new convergences and fresh areas of cooperation”

- Dr. S. Jaishankar

External Affairs Minister (India)

Opinions/Review/Expert View

Evolving Japan-Philippines Security Ties

Source: Simran Walia | Asia Times

<https://asiatimes.com/2023/11/evolving-japan-philippines-security-ties/> 20 November 2023



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Japan's natural security ally in Southeast Asia is the Philippines. That country, which is an archipelagic nation like Japan, has seen a continuous increase in security pressure from Beijing.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited the Philippines on November 3 and met with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The two leaders agreed on expanding their bilateral defense cooperation to address security challenges due to China's growing military activities in the South and East China Seas.

The two reached an agreement on starting negotiations for a defense pact, a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) that would help facilitate the presence of visiting forces and further conduct military training activities

collectively.

Kishida asserted that a defense agreement with the Philippines would allow the deployment of Japanese troops to the country, which would strengthen ties between the two nations and work on countering China's aggressive behavior. There have been increased tensions in the East and South China Seas and both Tokyo and Manila are locked in territorial disputes with China.

In June, Japan had sent a coast-guard patrol ship, the Akitsushima, to the Philippines and participated in a trilateral exercise with the US and the Philippines. Long-standing treaty allies of the United States are Japan and the Philippines. Because of this, their armed forces have been exposed to and probably impacted by American military tactics for a long time, which facilitates cooperation among them.

Japan has been steadily expanding its security engagement with the Philippines as Tokyo is also trying to move away from its pacifist stance, which was explicitly evident in its revised National Security Strategy document that came out in December 2022.

Moreover, Japanese leaders believe that stronger security ties with the Philippines could bolster deterrence in the Western Pacific. Japan has been steadily expanding its security engagement with the Philippines as Tokyo is also trying to move away from its pacifist stance, which was explicitly evident in its revised National Security Strategy document that came out in December 2022.

Both Japan and the Philippines explored the idea of such an agreement in 2015. However, this has now taken an urgency due to China's assertive behavior.

As part of its Official Security Assistance

(OSA) program, Japan intends to donate coastal radar systems to the Philippine Navy, valued at about \$4 million, to enhance its capabilities. With the announcement in April that the Philippines will be among the primary beneficiaries of the aid program, Japan has given Manila access to air surveillance radars, satellite communications equipment, and coast-guard vessels.

Moreover, with the launch of the OSA, Japan has broken with its long-standing policy of not using development aid for anything other than disaster relief in the military.

The Terms of Reference (TOR) pertaining to the Japan Self-Defense Forces' (JSDF's) humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations in the Philippines were already signed by the two leaders in February. The two nations are currently preparing to expand their cooperation into the military sphere.

Relations between the two nations date back at least six decades. Japan is the largest supporter of infrastructure development in the Philippines, contributing funds to the construction of bridges, railroads, and the Manila subway, among other projects.

Concerns have been expressed regarding China's objectives in the region and readiness to abide by international law and standards due to its military buildup and increasingly assertive maritime maneuvers. Beijing claims that because it has "indisputable sovereignty" over some South China Sea islands, its activities are legal.

Perhaps nowhere are these worries more felt than in the Philippines, where Chinese warships have been obstructing fishermen's passage and Manila is unable properly to explore oil and gas deposits in a region that an international tribunal has determined to be part of its exclusive economic zone.

In the contested waters, tensions between China and the Philippines have recently increased. Chinese ships crashed into a Philippine Coast Guard ship and a supply boat in the South China Sea in October. Japan and the US both condemned the incidents and

Japan denounced the incident and sided with the Philippines in preserving the maritime order, while Manila accused Beijing of purposefully colliding with its boats.

reaffirmed their commitment to support the Philippines in the event of an armed attack.

Japan denounced the incident and sided with the Philippines in preserving the maritime order, while Manila accused Beijing of purposefully colliding with its boats. It is evident that Manila's and Tokyo's decision to strengthen security ties was significantly influenced by their growing concerns about an increasingly assertive China.

Way forward

The two nations are in the process of negotiating a Reciprocal Access Agreement, which may enable cooperative military exercises and other joint operations by their armed forces. The Philippines has similar agreements with both the United States and Australia, and Japan has separate agreements of a similar nature with the United Kingdom and Australia.

The Philippines is seen as essential to preserving regional security and stability

because of its location relatively close to Taiwan and along important maritime trade routes. This is because there are worries in some circles that a crisis similar to Russia's invasion of Ukraine could arise in the region.

An RAA between Japan and the Philippines would facilitate joint exercises and give the JSDF more access to Philippine bases, possibly even enabling rotational deployments. Such an agreement would also greatly facilitate the JSDF's deployment to the Philippines during emergencies such as natural disasters.

Furthermore, the agreement would enhance trilateral collaboration with US military forces. The United States was able significantly to strengthen its defense posture in the disputed South China Sea and close to Taiwan this year thanks to an agreement reached by Washington and Manila that allowed access to four more military installations in the Philippines.

The Marcos administration canceled several development projects under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative and suspended a military exchange program with China because of the recent severe deterioration of Sino-Philippine relations.

Kishida's visit to Manila also included a number of agreements in the tourism and infrastructure sectors, coinciding with the two nations' strategic alignment on matters of defense and security. They not only share the same interests in the area of maritime security, but they also agree that resistance to Chinese coercion is necessary.

Japan aims to uphold the US-dominated "rules-based international order" and secure the "free and open Indo-Pacific" vision amid growing concerns over China.

It is unlikely that the Philippines is the only nation that would welcome increased security cooperation with Japan given China's persistently assertive actions. Most notably, Vietnam has accepted Japan's offers of patrol boats and participated in maritime drills with it. Meanwhile, it has been suggested that Japan may provide military support to Fiji and Malaysia in the future.

Though it has undoubtedly gotten off to a slow start, Japanese security engagement could soon pick up momentum.

The Marcos administration canceled several development projects under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative and suspended a military exchange program with China because of the recent severe deterioration of Sino-Philippine relations.

China's Gradual Stride for Grey Zone Activities in the Indian Ocean: Implications on India

Source: Gaurav Sen | Financial Express

<https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-chinas-gradual-stride-for-grey-zone-activities-in-the-indian-ocean-implications-on-india-3302988/>

09 November 2023



Since 2016, China's military operations have grown progressively more assertive. (Image/Reuters)

A new phrase has recently been added to the strategic lexicon. The term 'grey zone,' which has come to represent the uneasy ties between various Indo-Pacific countries and China. Despite being equally baffling and unnerving, this new kind of strained interstate ties, fortunately focused on avoiding war.

In a landmark piece published in 2015, Michael Mazarr studied the concept of the grey zone. Grey-zone operations do not include initiating wars but actively work to avoid them. The concept of a 'grey zone' blurs the lines between the two, providing an ambiguous middle ground by simultaneously excluding conflict but not ensuring peace either. If peace is defined as 'the absence of violence,' the concept of a 'grey zone' creates a conceptual conundrum because it is neither war nor peace.

China's foreign policy has grown increasingly

assertive because of the modernization of the PLA and the expansion of its economy. The countries with which it has disputes over territory, view China's actions throughout the grey zone as threats and dangers. The idea is the basis of Sun Tzu's advice that 'ultimate excellence lies not in winning every battle but in defeating the enemy without ever fighting.'

Although, the So-called 'grey zone' operations are not a concept or strategy that China independently devised. Instead, the United States was responsible for developing and introducing grey zone operations. The US Department of Defence stated in the Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR), which was released in 2010, that "the future strategic landscape will increasingly feature challenges in the ambiguous grey area that is neither fully war nor fully peace". The term

"grey zone challenges" is further described in the 2015 U.S. Special Operation Command White Paper. Notably, Japan has identified "grey zone situations"

and flagged probable confrontations owing to territorial sovereignty and objectives in the Asia-Pacific area since 2013, much like the United States. In both the Defence of Japan 2014 and Japan's 2013 National Security Strategy, the idea of "grey zones" is openly stated.

Japan previously highlighted its profound worries about the ongoing grey zone issues and the pressing risks presented by China in its Defence of Japan 2022. Taiwan's 2021 QDR, which was released by the Ministry of Defence, openly articulates, and refers to China's grey zone actions. The 'grey zone' is described in the document as

China's foreign policy has grown increasingly assertive because of the modernization of the PLA and the expansion of its economy.

“an ambiguous realm between peace and war.” By engaging in grey zone operations China hopes to discourage, dissuade, or lessen the competitive edge of competitors while pressuring Taiwan, the US, and others to act in accordance with its interests. Its goal is to show that it is militarily capable of resolving territorial conflicts like those involving the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, the South China Sea, and Taiwan’s unification. Beijing has used a variety of grey zone tactics, including economic pressure, cyber (or disinformation) warfare, military training, and missile tests.

Since 2016, China’s military operations have grown progressively more assertive; it frequently uses armed forces to demonstrate its opposition to President Tsai Ing-wen’s Cross-Strait policy and Taiwan’s pro-American attitude, even though the majority of Taiwanese support President Tsai’s hardline stance towards China. A minimum of 554 People Liberation Army flights entered Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) between September 16, 2020, and August 31, 2021, according to the ROC National Defence Report 2021. China’s PLA still engages in joint air and sea missions to improve and assess its military prowess. By engaging in grey zone activities, China hopes to persuade Taiwan and the US to change their policies towards it and make it abundantly evident to the rest of the world that there are real dangers in the Taiwan Strait.

A different situation is presented by China’s policy in the Indian Ocean. Beijing has made disproportionate territorial claims in the Western Pacific, where military vehicles are used in more aggressive grey zone activities. China, on the

other hand, has chosen to gradually assert its presence in the Indian Ocean.

Beijing has built bases for troops and installed military facilities on illegally claimed islands in the western Pacific, where it asserts ownership of the appropriate oceans, the seafloor, and subsoil. Even though several of these features lie outside of China’s 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the People’s Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) and Coast Guard warships are constantly stationed adjacent to them. These actions and China’s conduct have been labelled as hostile by the international community on numerous occasions. Furthermore, nations like Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines have frequently voiced their opposition to Beijing’s violations

Beijing has built bases for troops and installed military facilities on illegally claimed islands in the western Pacific, where it asserts ownership of the appropriate oceans, the seafloor, and subsoil.

of their individual EEZs and overbearing maritime claims in public. However, the Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean does not first seem to be as hostile. Beijing has mostly been present throughout the far-off IOR waterways with fisheries and research vessels, which China has claimed are fully inside its territorial waters and compliant with international law.

However, India is concerned about the growing number of Chinese fishing and research vessels that are navigating the Indian Ocean. The PLAN may use Chinese research vessels as its “eyes and ears.” Some researchers believe that Chinese fishing boats are PLAN “auxiliary naval forces” and constitute an integral component of China’s maritime militia, which is a part of Beijing’s maritime police system. Looking at these operations through the prism of China’s goal of becoming a major maritime power by 2049 is

enlightening. China might get more insight into the remote waters of the Indian Ocean as well as experience a naval expedition using even these non-military ships, which would enable it to develop into a blue-water navy capable of imposing maritime dominance. Even though China claims that the objective of its research boats is purely scientific, several IOR littoral states believe that these vessels may be gathering information to improve Beijing's maritime domain awareness by keeping an eye on ship activities near or inside these governments EEZs.

China's fishing boats and research vessels do not engage in direct military activities but may lay the groundwork for future military acts. However, if China's actions are regarded as coordinated with the ports it is purchasing in the Indian Ocean, they could have major consequences in the future. India should concentrate on developing a long-term strategy to handle this difficulty. A solution may lie in increasing maritime awareness among Quad nations. India should employ its extensive information network, which is dispersed throughout the Indian Ocean and includes data from the Fusion Centre and space-based maritime monitoring, to monitor any nefarious operations by Chinese ships.

China's fishing boats and research vessels do not engage in direct military activities but may lay the groundwork for future military acts.

Japan, South Korea and China Seek Leaders' Summit at 'Earliest' Time

Source: Jesse Johnson | Japan Times

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/11/26/japan/politics/japan-south-korea-china-trilateral-foreign-ministers-meeting/> 26 November 2023



Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin (center) and Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi pose for a photo ahead of trilateral talks in Busan, South Korea, on Sunday. | POOL / VIA KYODO

The foreign ministers of Japan, China and

South Korea held their first in-person talks in more than four years on Sunday, with the three agreeing to hold a trilateral leaders' summit at the "earliest" possible time.

Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, South Korea's Park Jin and China's Wang Yi spent around 100 minutes in talks that focused on a broad swath of issues, amid Beijing's growing regional military assertiveness and Tokyo and Seoul's deepening security ties with Washington, their mutual ally.

The trilateral talks in Busan, South Korea, were seen as a steppingstone toward reviving the three-way summit between the leaders of the trio of Asian powerhouses, but progress on

hammering out a specific date appeared elusive.

"We, the three ministers, reaffirmed the agreement to hold the summit, the pinnacle of the trilateral cooperation system, at the earliest mutually convenient time and agreed to accelerate the preparations necessary for the summit," the Yonhap news agency quoted Park as saying following the talks.

In opening remarks, Kamikawa said that Japan hoped to use Sunday's talks as an opportunity to "restart cooperation" among the three countries, while expressing a readiness to discuss a time frame for the leaders' summit.

Wang, a former ambassador to Japan who speaks the language fluently, did not mention the summit, but was quoted as saying that while three-way cooperation "has never been stopped," there remains "huge potential, strong demand and a wide range of resources" for improved tie-ups.

In terms of a timeline, South Korea has reportedly sought to hold the leaders' summit before the year's end.

Yet with just over a month left in the year — and China appearing cool to the idea — the odds of a leaders' summit being held in 2023 could be slipping.

The meeting came just days after North Korea claimed to have successfully put its first military spy satellite into orbit, and Pyongyang's increasingly potent nuclear and missile programs were high on the ministers' agenda.

The satellite launch, which saw a rocket fly over

the airspace above Okinawa Prefecture, briefly triggering a take-shelter warning, was swiftly condemned by Tokyo, Seoul and Washington. Beijing — traditionally Pyongyang's top patron and economic lifeline — did not criticize the launch, saying only that it hoped "all parties will exercise calm and restraint" and "engage in meaningful dialogue."

In a statement released by the Japanese Foreign Ministry following Sunday's meeting, Kamikawa issued a veiled call on Beijing to use its influence with Pyongyang to help restrain the country, telling her counterparts that "firm efforts

should be made toward ... the full implementation of U.N. Security Council resolutions" against North Korea.

China is widely believed to have relaxed its enforcement of those sanctions in recent months.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have soared following Tuesday's satellite launch, prompting the effective suspension of an inter-Korean military agreement intended to lower tensions between the two sides.

At the talks, Beijing — which has seen its economy mired in a slowdown in recent months — may have also been looking to promote tie-ups with Japanese and South Korean firms to attract investment while also seeking to create rifts in the two countries' improving economic and security cooperation with Washington as the Sino-U.S. rivalry heats up.

In August, the leaders of Japan, South Korea and the U.S. inaugurated "a new era" in trilateral cooperation at a historic meeting at the Camp

Japanese and South Korean firms to attract investment while also seeking to create rifts in the two countries' improving economic and security cooperation with Washington as the Sino-U.S. rivalry heats up.

David presidential retreat, agreeing to expand and cement engagement in a variety of fields that help boost deterrence — much to the chagrin of China.

Beijing has labeled the move an attempt to contain China, with some calling it the opening shot in a new Cold War.

At Sunday's meeting, Wang appeared to note this view, saying the three countries "must play a positive role in regional and global development with a more honest attitude."

A trilateral leaders summit could help bring the temperature down on all sides, with the ministers on Sunday agreeing to cooperate in a variety of other fields, including science and technology, sustainable development, public health and people-to-people exchanges.

Three-way leaders talks, which were first held in 2008, have not taken place since December 2019, due largely to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the deterioration in ties between Japan and South Korea over historical issues such as wartime labor during Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.

Although historical disputes have persisted — as evidenced by a South Korean court ruling Thursday ordering Japan to compensate a group of so-called comfort women — ties between the neighbors have warmed tremendously since South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol took office in May last year.

The term "comfort women" is a euphemism for those who suffered under Japan's military

brothel system before and during World War II. Tokyo has called the ruling "absolutely unacceptable," saying it is "clearly contrary to international law and agreements between the two countries."

Japan says all issues stemming from its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula were settled "completely and finally" under a 1965 bilateral deal, and that a landmark 2015 agreement between Tokyo and Seoul "finally and irreversibly" resolved the comfort women issue.

Kamikawa, who held bilateral talks with Park on Sunday morning, broached the issue of the comfort women suit, urging Seoul to "immediately take appropriate measures to remedy the status of its violation of international law," according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

The top Japanese diplomat, who is on her first visit to South Korea since taking up her post in September, also held bilateral talks with Wang on Saturday.

During those talks, Kamikawa "strongly urged" Beijing to immediately remove its complete ban on seafood imports from Japan over Tokyo's release of treated wastewater from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

The Fukushima issue has bedeviled Sino-Japanese relations already facing tensions over issues such as China's growing military assertiveness in the region. Despite this, both sides agreed to find a way to resolve the wastewater matter "through discussion and dialogue in a constructive manner," Japan's

Kamikawa "strongly urged" Beijing to immediately remove its complete ban on seafood imports from Japan over Tokyo's release of treated wastewater from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant.

Foreign Ministry said.

China has opposed the discharge of what it calls "nuclear-contaminated water," with Wang reiterating Beijing's stance during the talks and calling the move "irresponsible," according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

U.S.-Vietnam relations, the White House announced on November 13 that the United States and Indonesia had decided to elevate their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

Indonesia had decided to elevate their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership. It was the latest achievement in Washington's effort to expand its network of partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region and thus deter China's rising influence in Southeast

Asia.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which is the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog and gave its approval for the release, said late last month that the operation was "progressing as planned and without any technical concerns."

The Limits of the Expanding Indonesia-US Partnership

Source: BNian Peng | The Diplomat

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/the-limits-of-the-expanding-indonesia-us-partnership/> 21 November 2023

U.S. President Joe Biden (right) hosts a bilateral meeting with Indonesian President Joko Widodo in the



Oval Office of the White House, Nov. 13, 2023.

Credit: Official White House Photo by Adam Schultz

Two months after the upgrading of U.S.-Vietnam relations, the White House announced on November 13 that the United States and

Since the implementation of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the United States has made serious efforts to improve relations with strategically important countries that have territorial disputes with China. Thus far, the U.S. has not only restored its alliance with the Philippines, which had frayed under the previous Duterte administration, but also brought the country into its anti-China camp under the Marcos administration. In September this year, the U.S. successfully upgraded its relationship with Vietnam to a comprehensive strategic partnership, the most significant victory of Washington's diplomatic offensive in Southeast Asia after the pandemic.

Indonesia, often viewed as the de facto leader of ASEAN and entangled in a dispute with China over an exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea, has become an additional focal point for U.S. diplomacy in Southeast Asia. Its newfound courtship of Indonesia culminated in President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's visit to the White House and the relationship upgrade in mid-November.

The United States has several strategic objectives in deepening ties with Indonesia. First, by fostering a robust relationship with Jakarta, Washington could strengthen its ties with ASEAN to influence its perspective amid intensifying

China-U.S. competition. As U.S. President Joe Biden stated, the United States and Indonesia are bound by a shared commitment to ASEAN centrality and the common principles outlined in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. Since Indonesia played a key role in proposing and advancing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. has sought to enhance the strategic links between the two strategies by elevating its relationship with Indonesia.

Second, the U.S. aims to expand its military presence in the Indo-Pacific region by strengthening security cooperation with Indonesia, thereby countering China's growing military influence. Already, the United States has expanded the number of military bases in the Philippines to which the U.S. military has access from five to nine. While Vietnam and Indonesia are not U.S. allies, and are unlikely to accede to hosting U.S. bases, Washington is expanding defense ties with these partners in other ways. While Indonesia has not agreed to host a military base for U.S. troops, it has accepted the United States' proposal to contribute \$3 million to fund a maritime training center in Batam, the largest city in the Riau Islands province of Indonesia.

Moreover, the United States also announced that it would hold the Indonesia-U.S. Security Dialogue and the Indonesia-U.S. Bilateral Defense Dialogue in the near future to keep up with China, which established foreign minister and defense minister dialogues with Indonesia during Jokowi's China tour in October 2023.

Third, the United States aims to enhance the maritime capabilities of China's rival claimants in the South China Sea. While Indonesia and China do not have competing claims to any maritime features in the region, Indonesia has objected to Chinese activities in what it claims as its exclusive economic zone near the Natuna Islands, part of Riau Islands province.

Following bilateral talks at the White House, the United States pledged to mobilize more than \$5 million in assistance through the Maritime Security Joint Work Plan to enhance Indonesia's maritime awareness and maritime law enforcement. The U.S. has sought to bolster the maritime reconnaissance and patrol capabilities of South China Sea claimants, thereby supporting their efforts against China in the region. Against this backdrop, China must increase its strategic expenditures associated with maintaining stability and national sovereignty in the South China Sea.

Nonetheless, Indonesia would not completely join the U.S. camp for many reasons. First and foremost, Indonesia's deeply rooted philosophy of strategic autonomy restrains its alignment with Washington. Indonesia has not only reaffirmed that it would not "take sides" between China and the U.S. but also committed to guaranteeing the centrality of ASEAN in the great power rivalry.

Indonesia also does not want to be a victim of the China-U.S. competition. In contrast, it employs a hedging approach that involves maintaining contact with major countries while attempting to strike a balance between them. By

The United States has several strategic objectives in deepening ties with Indonesia. First, by fostering a robust relationship with Jakarta, Washington could strengthen its ties with ASEAN to influence its perspective amid intensifying China-U.S. competition.

adopting this approach, Indonesia can optimize its advantages while avoiding the pitfalls of big power rivalry. This rationale was behind both Indonesia's decision to enhance its relations with the United States in November and its comprehensive strategic collaboration with China in October.

Indonesia, in contrast to the Philippines, has refrained from implementing offensive strategies that would intensify hostilities in the South China Sea. Instead, it has advocated for stability and tranquility in the region.

Moreover, Indonesia and the U.S. hold divergent stances on the Israel-Palestine conflict. As a majority Muslim country, the Indonesian government sent a clear message to the world that it stands with the Palestinians. Although the Indonesian government is unlikely to confront the United States' pro-Israel policies, the new wave of anti-American sentiments in Indonesia triggered by the recent Israel-Hamas conflict that started on October 7, would not allow the Indonesian government to strengthen relations with the U.S. further, at least for the time being.

To conclude, the United States' earnest efforts to win Indonesia over has seen demonstrable results, but even so no one should expect Jakarta to join in efforts to contain China. Indonesia would maintain a delicate balance between the two great powers and avoid being caught in the China-U.S. tension due to its high strategic autonomy.

Deciphering China-Pakistan Naval Exercises in the Indian Ocean

Source: Abhijit Singh | ORF

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/deciphering-china-pakistan-naval-exercises-in-the-indian-ocean> 20 November 2023



What is special about China-Pakistan maritime exercises in the Northern Arabian Sea? Not much, one might plausibly argue. The two countries regularly perform naval drills in the Indian Ocean, with the Sea Guardian exercises now an annual feature. Normally, the exercises are held in waters close to Pakistan and rarely in ways that directly challenge Indian interests. Whatever the rhetoric surrounding China-Pakistan military cooperation, Beijing has so far refrained from establishing a permanent naval presence in Pakistan.

Why, then, has there been so much interest around Sea Guardian-3 held last week in the Northern Arabian Sea? Pakistani hype, it seems, is the reason, with Pakistan naval commanders playing up the exercises as the first joint maritime patrol between China and Pakistan.

According to reports, the two sides observers on each other's participating units, including a Chinese observer on a Pakistani anti-submarine

The United States pledged to mobilize more than \$5 million in assistance through the Maritime Security Joint Work Plan to enhance Indonesia's maritime awareness and maritime law enforcement.

patrol aircraft.

For context, this is the third time that the PLAN and Pakistan Navy (PN) have come together for the “Sea Guardian” exercises. The two earlier iterations, in January 2020 (in the northern Arabian Sea) and in July 2022 (in the East China Sea), were regular engagements but they were preceded by annual bilateral exercises between the two navies that had been ongoing since 2014. What seems to have caused some speculation this time around is that the exercise came a day after the 2+2 Ministerial dialogue between India and the U.S. where maritime security in the Indo-Pacific was a major topic of discussion. With New Delhi announcing its decision to become a full member of the Bahrain-based US-led multilateral grouping Combined Maritime Forces, China, Indian analysts surmise, is keen to signal its strategic intent to counter United States and Indian moves in the Indian Ocean.

The PN is undergoing a programme of modernisation, a seeming response to the Indian Navy’s (IN) growing power and presence in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan’s naval leadership continues to view the IN with suspicion. The latter’s sustained growth in recent years is a key driver of the PN’s development and expansion of assets.

The PN is also leery of the IN’s propensity to besiege Pakistan’s Makran coast during times of political crisis between India and Pakistan. During Operation Vijay in 1999 and Operation Parakram in 2001, the IN deployed warships in the Northern Arabian Sea, establishing what Indian analysts termed a loose blockade. More

recently, in 2019, immediately after a terror attack in Pulwama, India positioned a fleet of warships close to Pakistani territorial waters. The deployment was meant to signal Indian resolve, but the PN saw it as an overly aggressive move.

Part of the problem for India is the entrenched perception among Pakistan’s strategic elite that a limited conventional war between India and Pakistan remains more—rather than less—likely. Khalid Kidwai, Director General of Pakistan’s Strategic Plans Division, suggests that as the weaker state in the dyad, Pakistan’s sensitivities are more fraught than India’s. Islamabad, he contends, is obliged to use every tool in its strategic toolkit (sub-conventional to conventional and nuclear) to target India, which, he avers, has aggressive designs and uses strategies like ‘Cold Start’ to provoke Pakistan. Such talk may seem delusional to Indian observers but for Pakistani commanders, it is an article of faith.

It should interest Indian observers that in May this year, China completed delivery of all four Type 054A/P guided missile frigates to the Pakistani Navy. Pakistan is all set to acquire eight Yuan-class submarines from China, with four of them scheduled for delivery by the end of 2024. Turkey, meanwhile, has delivered the first of Babur-class corvettes, also known as the PN MILGEM class, to the Pakistan Navy. Pakistan and Türkiye are also co-developing the Jinnah-class frigate, the construction for which will begin after the completion of the order for Babur-class corvettes by the state-owned Karachi shipyard. The entire effort appears geared to make the PN a potent force in the Indian Ocean.

Pakistan’s maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean pivots around engagement with China. But the strategy also has a diplomatic dimension that should not be overlooked.

Yet, it would be a mistake for Indian observers to regard the PN in purely adversarial terms. It is today more conceptually evolved than earlier and not solely focused on countering India. Pakistan's 2018 maritime doctrine describes the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as "a strategic space where the interests of many regional and extra-regional powers intersect" and where a cooperative approach is the best way forward. As Pakistan's naval planners see it, the IOR is critical for the economic and military power balance, which requires the Pakistan navy to position itself as a regional player and security provider in the region.

Beyond preserving a "threat-free environment" for Pakistan—a seeming reference to the challenge posed by India—the PN's Aman exercises (held biennially) and the Regional Maritime Security Patrols instituted in 2020 seek to expand Pakistan's diplomatic space in the Indian Ocean. This is partly the logic underlying Pakistan's bilateral and multilateral naval engagements. The PN is well aware that the IN seeks to exclude it from collaborative frameworks in the Indian Ocean. Despite being a member of the 25-member Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, the PN was not invited by India for the group's 10-year celebrations in 2022. The PN's bid to invest in partnerships in the Indian Ocean is a way of counteracting the IN's growing influence.

The last thing Pakistan's naval planners would like to see is for India to seize the strategic initiative in the Indian Ocean. China is Pakistan's best bet to push back against Indian dominance of the littoral. Contrary to what many in New Delhi might imagine, China-Pakistan naval engagement is about competitive diplomacy in the Indian

Ocean rather than Chinese (or Pakistani) power projection in India's maritime neighbourhood.

Cherry-Picks of the Month

1. Japan and Vietnam Upgrade Security Ties with Eye on China - <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-and-Vietnam-upgrade-security-ties-with-eye-on-China>
2. U.S. and India Reaffirm Security Ties as Their Top Diplomats and Defense Officials Hold Talks - <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/u-s-and-india-reaffirm-security-ties-as-their-top-diplomats-and-defense-officials-hold-talks>
3. India and Australia Strengthen Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue - <https://ddnews.gov.in/international/india-and-australia-strengthen-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-22-ministerial>
4. The 'Chip War' is now Embedded in US-China Techno-Economic Rivalry - <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-chip-war-is-now-embedded-in-us-china-techno-economic-rivalry>
5. Strengthening Ties: India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue and the Indo-Pacific Vision - <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-strengthening-ties-india-australia-22-ministerial-dialogue-and-the-indo-pacific-vision-3310578/>

CAPS Experts- Infocus

1. Japan's Increasing Military Posture in Asia - <https://capsindia.org/japans-increasing-military-posture-in-asia/>
2. INDO-US Security Ties: 2+2 Dialogue - <https://capsindia.org/indo-us-security-ties-22-dialogue/>
3. Change of Regime in Maldives: Why India Matters? - <https://capsindia.org/change-of-regime-in-maldives-why-india-matters/>

Debates/ Podcasts

1. South China Sea Flashpoints: The Second Thomas Shoal Crisis - <https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/south-china-sea-flashpoints-the-second-thomas-shoal-crisis/>
2. Why does China claim almost the entire South China Sea? - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/24/why-does-china-claim-almost-the-entire-south-china-sea>



The Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) is an independent, non-profit think tank that undertakes and promotes policy-related research, study and discussion on defence and military issues, trends and developments in air power and space for civil and military purposes, as also related issues of national security. The Centre is headed by Air Marshal Anil Chopra, PVSM AVSM VM VSM (Retd).

Centre for Air Power Studies

P-284 Arjan Path, Subroto Park, New Delhi - 110010

Tel.: +91 - 11 - 25699131/32 Fax: +91 - 11 - 25682533

Email: capsnetdroff@gmail.com

Website: www.capsindia.org

Editorial Team: Air Commodore SP Singh VSM (Retd), Dr Joshy Paul, Ms Simran Walia and Mr Gaurav Sen

Composed and Formatted by: Mr Rohit Singh, CAPS

Contact: +91 9716511091

Email: rohit_singh.1990@hotmail.com

Disclaimer: Information and data included in this newsletter is for educational non-commercial purposes only and has been carefully adapted, excerpted or edited from sources deemed reliable and accurate at the time of preparation. The Centre does not accept any liability for error therein. All copyrighted material belongs to respective owners and is provided only for purposes of wider dissemination.