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# GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

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# Critical Test For Xi Jinping As Anger Over Covid Lockdowns Transforms Into Calls For Broader Political Change

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/critical-test-for-xi-jinping-as-anger-over-covid-lockdowns-transforms-into-calls-for-broader-political-change/articleshow/95827311.cms>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-protests-highlight-xis-covid-policy-dilemma-walk-it-back-or-not-2022-11-28/>

The rare street protests that erupted in cities across China over the weekend were a referendum against President Xi Jinping's zero-COVID policy and the strongest public defiance during his political career.

## COMMENTS

It is conjectured that not since the protests of Tiananmen Square in 1989 have so many Chinese risked arrest and other repercussions to take to the streets over a single issue. However, at the time of the Tiananmen protests and crackdown by Chinese authorities, the last occasion that demonstrations led to the replacement of the party's general secretary, there were internal divisions amongst top party leaders about how to manage the crisis and what path to take China in future.

The same is not applicable in case of Xi. Xi has renewed his term as party leader and military commander-in-chief and placed his acolytes in all the important positions in the party. Leaders who have previously expressed contrarian views or governed in a different style from him were marginalized.

***Although this authoritarian arrangement allowed Xi to be more powerful, it also contains vulnerabilities, as exposed by the protests. By surrounding himself with only Yes men, Xi is likely to trap himself in an echo chamber, away from the ground reality and out of touch with how much people have suffered from his COVID policy.***

## Quantum of Resistance

While some protesters chanted "Down with Xi Jinping, Down with Chinese Communist Party", most other people only concerned themselves with resisting a lockdown of their residential compounds or exemption from frequent tests for the virus. Students were reportedly not highly organized or led by a central figure. However, few analysts believe that middle-class students and blue-collar labourers like those on assembly lines at Apple supplier Foxconn have found a common cause.

Protests spread to at least eight major cities: Guangzhou, Chengdu, Nanjing, Chongqing, Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan and Urumqi.

## CHINA

Most protesters complained about excessive restrictions. Hours after police broke up the demonstration, people returned to the same spot on Sunday after another protest. Public dissatisfaction with Xi's zero-COVID policy, expressed on social media or offline in the form of putting up posters in universities or by protesting, is Xi's biggest domestic challenge since the 2019 protests in Hong Kong against an extradition bill.

On Monday, the number of new daily cases rose to 40,347, including 36,525 with no symptoms. China on Tuesday said it will take steps to "minimise" the impact of its draconian corona virus lockdowns. Decision to ease at least some of the restrictions appeared to be aimed at quelling anger.

### **Xi's Dilemma**

The protests have magnified Xi's Dilemma: how to revert a policy that was initially a point of pride for him but is now becoming a growing liability. Bending under public pressure to roll back zero-COVID policy, will make him appear weak and that would encourage people to take to the streets in future whenever they want change. It is not Xi's personality trait to lose face or give in. Xi tried tweaking the zero-COVID policy with the release of "20 measures" last month, in an attempt to standardize prevention measures nationwide and make them friendlier to residents and to the economy. But as Xi has not officially renounced the need to curb all outbreaks, many local authorities are still erring on the side of caution and implementing stricter lockdowns and quarantine rules than stipulated in the "20 measures". There appears to be a gap between Xi's policy enunciation and implementation on ground by the new administration.

Xi had claimed personal responsibility for leading the "war" against COVID-19, justified zero-COVID with a need to "put people above everything" and counted his "correct" COVID policy among his political achievements when he sought a precedent-breaking third term at the 20th Communist Party Congress in October.

Even though the protests are embarrassing for Xi, but according to analysts, they come nowhere near to toppling him because he has full control of the party, military, security and propaganda machinery. What seems to have really worried Chinese authorities is that the protesters are slowly beginning to raise other issues during their anti-lockdown demonstrations, which could prove to be the most critical test of President's Xi Jinping's rule.

### **Impact on Economy**

The harsh anti-COVID curbs implemented by China are already having a disastrous effect on its economy; businesses are hurting and the workers are fed up of low wages and poor labour conditions. Foxconn's vast iPhone factory on the outskirts of the Zhengzhou is the burning example.

## US Dismisses China Objections To South China Sea Mission

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/us-dismisses-china-objections-to-south-china-sea-mission/articleshow/95852735.cms>

<https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/international/2022/11/29/fgn22-us-china-scs.html>

According to the US Navy, its guided missile cruiser USS Chancellorsville on 29 November, Tuesday “asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the South China Sea near the Spratly Islands, consistent with international law.” China called the action illegal and said it mobilized naval and air assets to issue warnings and drive off the ship.

The US Navy dismissed Beijing's protests over a “freedom of navigation operation” conducted in the South China Sea, in the latest incident drawing new attention to one of the world's potential military flashpoints.

### COMMENTS

China claims the area virtually in its entirety. The Navy said that China's sweeping maritime claims pose a serious threat to the freedom of navigation and overflight, free trade and unimpeded commerce, and freedom of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations.

In an unusual move, the Navy's 7th Fleet issued a rebuttal to China's objections to Tuesday's mission, calling it “the latest in a long string of (Chinese) actions to misrepresent lawful U.S. maritime operations and assert its excessive and illegitimate maritime claims” in the South China Sea.

“As long as some countries continue to claim and assert limits on rights that exceed their authority under international law, the United States will continue to defend the rights and freedoms of the sea guaranteed to all,” it said.

Whereas, spokesperson for the Southern Theater Command, Air Force Col. Tian Junli, was quoted as saying. “The U.S. military's actions have seriously violated China's sovereignty and security, which is further ironclad evidence of its pursuit of navigational hegemony and militarisation of the South China Sea,”

“China has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea islands and their adjacent waters.”



## CHINA

The long-seething South China Sea territorial conflicts involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei have long been regarded as a delicate fault line in the U.S.-China rivalry in the region. While the U.S. lays no claims to the strategic waterway, where an estimated USD 5 trillion in global trade transits each year, it has said that freedom of navigation and overflight is in America's national interest. The sea is also home to rich fishing stocks and a potential wealth of energy and mineral resources.



*Source: The Times of India*

In March, U.S. Indo-Pacific commander Adm. John C. Aquilino told The Associated Press that China has fully militarised at least three of several islands it built in the disputed waters with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment. He described it as an increasingly aggressive move that threatens all nations operating nearby.

Then in July, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on China to comply with a 2016 arbitration ruling that invalidated Beijing's vast claims on historical grounds in the South China Sea.

On a visit to the area earlier this month, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris reaffirmed Washington's commitment to defend the Philippines under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. She also announced an additional aid of USD 7.5 million to Philippine maritime law enforcement agencies.

# Russia Is Using Energy As A Weapon

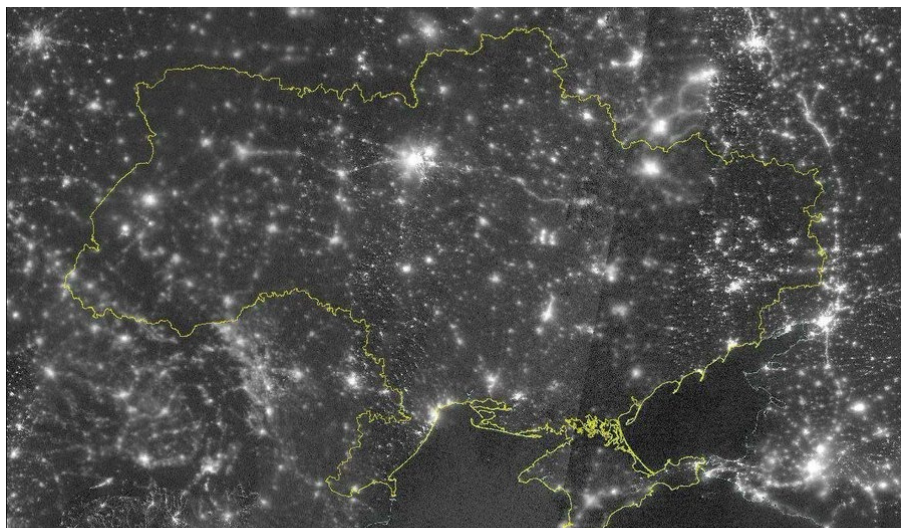
- *Reuters*
- <https://indianexpress.com>
- <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-strikes-leave-six-million-in-ukraine-without-power>

## Scenario: Massive Strike by Russia flattens power grid in Ukraine

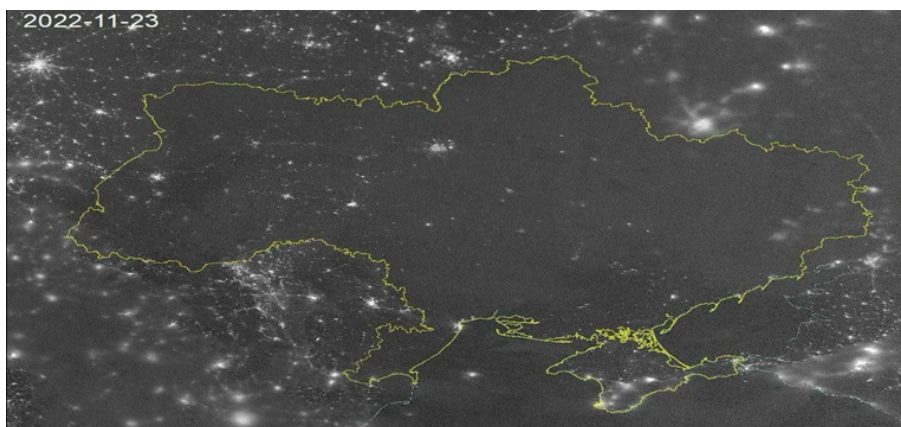
- Russian airstrikes that have cut the nation's power generation capacity in half, just as the UN health agency issued a wintertime humanitarian disaster alert for Ukraine. Authorities warned that the missile attacks, which Ukraine's national grid operator Ukrenergo described as having caused "colossal" damage, might result in power outages for millions of Ukrainians, including those living in the capital Kyiv, at least until the end of March. Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, the head of Ukrenergo, stated on Tuesday that virtually no thermal or hydroelectric stations had escaped damage, but he disregarded the need to evacuate residents. Authorities in Kherson, a recently liberated Ukrainian city with seriously damaged infrastructure, warned residents that they would be moved to other areas as winter temperatures in Ukraine drop below -20°C (-4°F).
- Due to widespread blackouts brought on by Russia's attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure, three nuclear power facilities had to be removed as a precaution from the national grid. Lviv, a city in western Ukraine, experienced "interruptions" in its water supply and was left "without light," according to its Mayor. In the meantime, neighbourhood heating systems and water and sewage systems would fail in cities like Kyiv. In temperatures below zero, pipes would freeze and crack. Compatibility is a part of the issue. Transformers are used to reduce the high voltage of electricity coming from power plants to a level that homes can use. The old Soviet five-step technique is used extensively in the Ukrainian grid to accomplish this. Different voltages are used in Western European systems. Transformers are designed to operate at specific voltages, so older Ukrainian ones cannot be replaced by those designed for systems in Western Europe. Meanwhile, France is sending 100 high-powered generators to Ukraine to help people get through the coming months.

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

- Viewed from space, Ukraine has become a dark patch on the globe at night, NASA satellite images showed. The war's first winter will now test whether Ukraine can press on with its campaign to recapture territory, or whether Russia's commanders can halt Kyiv's momentum. Though sanctions have been put on Russia, it did not have immediate impact, but, yes, in the long run, sanctions can weaken the economy and lower GDP.



*Image taken on 27th January, 2022*



*Source: NASA Satellite Images. (23rd November 2022)  
The images depict the degree of harm the Russian Strikes on  
Ukraine's sector caused.*

## BACKGROUND

Ukraine needs more effective air defences to save its electrical infrastructure from Russian attack.



## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Since October 10th, Russia has targeted the electrical-power system, an essential piece of Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, with more than 200 cruise missiles and Kamikaze drones, believe that some energy industry experts from the Russian Federation provided assistance to their armed forces," claims Dmytro Sakharuk, executive director of DTEK, the biggest private power firm in Ukraine. They deliberately chose their targets, and they went about it quite methodically. The electrical substations that connect various portions of Ukraine's system together have been Russia's main targets; some have been hit with as many as ten missiles. The system is intended to dismantle the infrastructure, so that power cannot be transferred between different parts of the nation to balance the load. Russia needs the West to stop backing his foe in order to win the war in Ukraine. This winter will present with finest chance to rift them. 40–50% of the natural gas was imported by the EU before the war came from Russia. Russia has shut off the flow of a significant pipeline to Europe in August, resulting in hike in fuel costs. Europe has so far handled this shock successfully, amassing enough gas to fill storage facilities. But many consumers have nonetheless been impacted by the increase in wholesale energy prices. Despite market fuel prices having fallen from their peaks, real average home energy and gas expenses in Europe are 144% and 78% higher than they were from 2000 to 2019.

### COMMENTS

- Ukraine needs more effective air defences to save its electrical infrastructure from Russian attack. Since October 10th, Russia has targeted the electrical-power system, an essential piece of Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, with more than 200 cruise missiles and Kamikaze drones, believe that some energy industry experts from the Russian Federation provided assistance to their armed forces," claims Dmytro Sakharuk, executive director of DTEK, the biggest private power firm in Ukraine. They deliberately chose their targets, and they went about it quite methodically. The electrical substations that connect various portions of Ukraine's system together have been Russia's main targets; some have been hit with as many as ten missiles. The system is intended to dismantle the infrastructure, so that power cannot be transferred between different parts of the nation to balance the load.
- The classical objective of any military commander in a war is to capture and hold the ground of tactical importance. However, the important lesson is that the sustainable political power emanates from the economy, not the barrel of a gun. Hence, the wars are about the economy and control over resources. Therefore, at the doctrinal level, nations have an overarching policy of economic dominance and/or degradation towards their adversaries. Being economically more robust than the adversary and hurting the latter is the essence of all wars. Therefore, the use of energy is a weapon will have an impact on the economy.

# Myanmar Releases 6000 Prisoners Including Australian Economist

[https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/myanmar-releases-6000-prisoners-including-australian-economist/articleshow/95571437.cms?utm\\_source=Google\\_Newsstand&utm\\_campaign=RSS\\_Feed&utm\\_medium=Referral](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/myanmar-releases-6000-prisoners-including-australian-economist/articleshow/95571437.cms?utm_source=Google_Newsstand&utm_campaign=RSS_Feed&utm_medium=Referral)

## BACKGROUND

- Myanmar's military leaders have released Sean Turnell, an Australian economist and former advisor to democracy icon Aung San Sui Kyi and almost 6000 others from prison under an amnesty, to mark Myanmar's national day and also on humanitarian grounds, state media reported on Thursday. Former British envoy Vicky Bowman and her husband were among those released, along with US citizen Kyaw Htay Oo and Japanese filmmaker Toru Kubota. Also included were 11 celebrities and Kyaw Tint Swe, a former minister and a close aide to Sui Kyi.
- Turnell had been charged with violating a state secrets law. Bowman, whose husband is a prominent Burmese artist Ko Htein Lin, had been charged with immigration violations. Kubota had been charged with sedition and violating a communication law.

## COMMENTS

Myanmar has been in the political turmoil since the military staged coup by arresting civilian leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi on 01 February 2021. The coup sparked widespread protests that were often violently shut down and helped fuel armed resistance among some of Myanmar's many ethnic groups. Due to continuous military actions, security situation in Myanmar worsened, which in turn increased humanitarian crisis. These releases appear to have been made under intense regional and global pressure on Myanmar over a period of time and are aimed at relieving such pressures, especially amid concerns that Indonesia might take tougher measures against the Junta as the new chair of ASEAN. These releases have the potential to pave the way for better security situation in Myanmar in times to come.



Source: Times of India

## Pakistan Myanmar Military Axis Becoming Deeper Under Chinese Guidance

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-myanmar-military-axis-becoming-deeper-under-chinese-guidance/articleshow/95645830.cms>

Last month, a senior-level Pakistani military delegation visited Myanmar to inspect a defence industry complex near Yangon and participate in a workshop on JF-17 block II aircraft that Myanmar had purchased from Islamabad. Another Pakistani team had also visited Myanmar to provide technical assistance to manufacture weapons.

### COMMENTS



*Source: Economic Times*

The Myanmar Government has grounded most of the JF-17 Thunder fighters, a multi role combat aircraft jointly manufactured by China and Pakistan, which were acquired from a China Pakistan joint venture, due to technical malfunctions. This could create a potential hurdle for the military axis between the three nations. The visit of senior level Pakistani military delegation to Myanmar is likely to have been pushed by China to resolve these technical difficulties being faced by Myanmar military.

## Pakistan Ex-Spy Is New Army Chief

<https://www.telegraphindia.com/world/pakistan-ex-spy-is-new-army-chief/cid/1900071>

Pakistan's former spymaster and senior-most Lieutenant General Asim Munir has been appointed as the new army chief by President Arif Alvi. He will be the first army chief who has headed both the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Military Intelligence (MI). His stint as the spy chief at the ISI was the shortest ever as he was replaced by Lieutenant General Faiz Hamid within eight months on the insistence of then Prime Minister Imran Khan in 2019. Munir will replace General Qamar Javed Bajwa who retires on November 29 after two consecutive three-year terms.

### COMMENTS

Gen Syed Asif Munir was DG of the ISI in November 2018 and he watched the Pulmana Attack in February 2019. He also served in the areas in the core that overlooks or deals with Kashmir in India. No army chief of Pakistan has been friendly towards India. India has been closely watching the development as the new Pakistani Army chief is expected to influence the government's stance on Islamabad-New Delhi relations as well as Pakistan's policies towards 'all-weather ally' China and also the United States. Previous Army Chief, Gen Bajwa wanted to improve relations with India to foster Pakistan's economic stability, and it remains to be seen whether his successor will continue with such a stance. Pakistan has recently been taken off the watchlist of the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The country is also facing an extremely precarious economic situation.

Gen Munir will also decide whether the TTP can still be counted among the good militants in view of the fragile six moth old ceasefire broken by the TTP. This instability will not come as good news for an already besieged government and a nation trying to brace itself in the face of an impending showdown between the military and former PM Imran Khan. Any increase in the influence of the TTP or its affiliates will not bode well for India, as it will embolden other terror groups, sparking instability across South Asia.

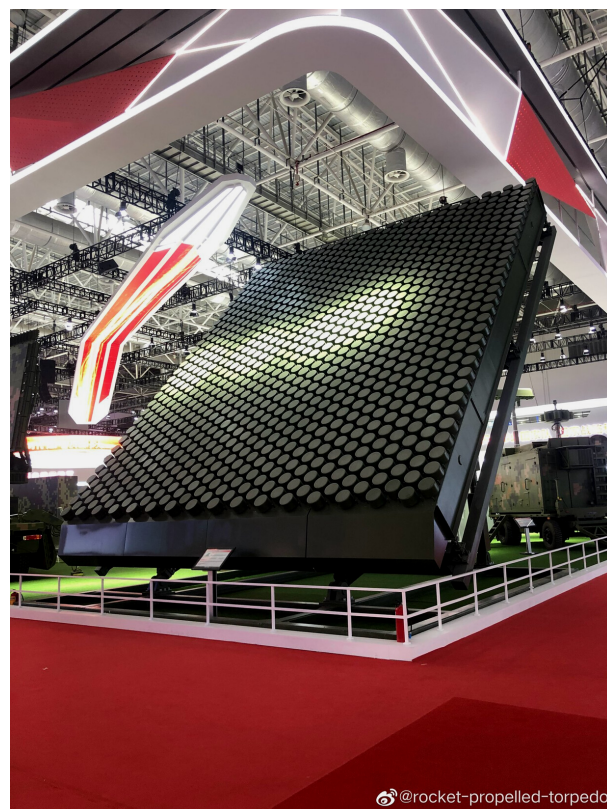
The feeling in Pakistan's public circles is that the army's reputation has taken a beating, and there is also growing sense of frustration at the military's meddling in politics. Whether the new army chief can quell this dissatisfaction will be watched closely. Mr Imran Khan will also prove to be a challenging adversary, especially in the run-up to the elections next year. We need to keep a close a watch on the new chief policies and his position on counter-terrorism and regional security. The next few months in Pakistan will be turbulent, with fluid political dynamics under a besieged government and a defiant challenger. As always in Pakistan, the balance of power will be held by the Army, by extension, Gen Syed Asif Munir.



## China's 'Satellite Killer' SLC-18 Radar Could Make Its Way To Pakistan; Can Detect & Track Multiple Low Earth Orbit (LEO) Satellites

<https://eurasianimes.com/new-china-satellite-killer-slc-18-radar-could-make-its-way-to-pakistan-can-detect-track-multiple/>

As part of this plan, China will supply its state-of-the-art SLC-18 space surveillance radar to Pakistan. The ten-meter-tall SLC-18 radar is said to be particularly successful in detecting and tracking multiple Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites in all conditions. LEO satellites are located anywhere from 200 kilometers to 2,000 kilometers above the Earth's surface. These satellites are used primarily for data collection and military surveillance and have steadily evolved into critical equipment for powerful countries seeking remote intelligence. LEO satellites can carry out intense, 360-degree, and all-factor hotspot surveillance thanks to their powerful capability, small size, and flexible orbits. China's new radar is capable of monitoring such satellites. The SLC-18 was developed by the state-owned China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC), which also manufactures electronic systems and components, missiles, radars, and other weapons for the People's Liberation Army (PLA).



Source: Eurasian Times

### COMMENTS

Satellites are the biggest means of gathering information, which may change the course of the war. The SLC-18 radar provides capabilities for situational awareness against low-orbiting satellites to balance the tactical stance. It is important to note that India is a significant space power with a diverse array of satellites in orbit. With the SLC-18 radar, Pakistan will be able to see where the Indian satellites are. China wants to use Pakistan to counter Indian satellites with the help of SLC-18 radar. This radar will allow China-friendly countries to locate targets in space. It will play an important role in balancing the battlefield. This radar would track any satellite and trace its path.



SLC-18 radar's situational awareness against LEO satellites and competitively priced ground-based space target monitoring can help the Belt and Road Initiative. It is a vital step in any future low-orbit counter-measure engagements and would be a major technological advancement as it would not only be a tracking tool but also a targeting system. There is also the threat of directed energy weapons (DEWs), which, if integrated with the radar system, could be tasked to neutralise a satellite or a missile.

China is Pakistan's top supplier of military equipment, including aircraft, missiles, and warships. China supplies most of the weapons to Pakistan. Between the five years from 2017 to 2021, Pakistan bought 72% of its total weapons from China. Pakistan accounts for 47 percent of China's total arms exports.

## Imran Khan Ups The Ante, Says Party Will Quit From All Provincial Assemblies

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistan-imrans-pti-to-quit-from-all-provincial-assemblies/articleshow/95793002.cms>

Imran Khan, in his latest effort to pile pressure on the Shehbaz Sharif government, has announced that his party members will resign from all the provincial assemblies in the country. Khan said his party PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) did not want to remain a part of the current "corrupt" political system and will instead resign from all the assemblies. He was addressing his first public rally, in the garrison town of Rawalpindi, since surviving an "assassination" attempt earlier this month. However he did not give a date when the members might resign, adding that the announcement is likely soon. PTI currently holds power in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Khan said that he was calling off his protest march to Islamabad because he feared it would cause havoc in the country.

### COMMENTS

Imran Khan is now in the opposition and has been demanding early elections. Khan launched a protest march late last month from the eastern city of Lahore toward Islamabad as part of his campaign for early polls. The march was temporarily halted after the "attempt" on Khan on November 3. The 70-year-old leader has repeatedly alleged that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, interior minister Rana Sanaullah and ISI Counter Intelligence Wing head Maj-Gen Faisal Naseer were behind the attack on him. Imran Khan said he would no longer march to Islamabad. The protests were to culminate in a march to Islamabad which threatened to worsen political turmoil in the nuclear-armed country, which is also battling an economic crisis. The current government has said that the elections will take place in Oct 2023. PTI has already resigned from the federal parliament, but remains in power in two provinces and two administrative units.

## REGIONAL SCAN: PAKISTAN

General Asim Munir, who ran the country's spy agency, was fired without an explanation from the then-premier ie Mr Imran Khan. Munir replaces Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, who Mr Imran Khan has also accused of playing a role in his ouster. General Bajwa denies the allegation. Pakistan's military, the world's sixth-largest, is hugely influential in the country and has staged at least three coups since independence in 1947, ruling for more than three decades. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

## Pakistan Reopens Border Crossing With Afghanistan After Shooting

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/21/pakistan-reopens-border-crossing-with-afghanistan-after-shooting>

Pakistan has reopened a key border crossing with neighbouring Afghanistan, after an Afghan gunman killed a Pakistani security guard there, forcing a closure of the crossing. Shehzad Zehri, an official in Chaman, the border city in the southwestern province of Balochistan, confirmed the reopening. The deadlock has ended and mobility between the two countries has resumed for all purposes, including pedestrians as well as trade.



*Source: Al Jazeera*

### COMMENTS

Pakistan and landlocked Afghanistan share 18 crossing points, with the busiest ones being the northwestern Torkham and Chaman border posts. The two neighbours share a porous border of almost 2,670 kms (1,640 miles). The Chaman border, also known as Friendship Gate, is situated nearly 120km (74 miles) to the northwest of Pakistan's provincial capital Quetta, is one of the busiest border crossings between the two countries and is used by thousands of people every day. The Taliban government in Afghanistan condemned the incident and ordered the formation of a fact-finding committee to investigate it. People and the business of both countries are getting affected because of border crossings. Afghanistan mostly relied on trade with Pakistan to generate revenue. Pakistan, like other nations, wants the Taliban to fulfill their commitment to the international community to respect human and women's rights.

Since its takeover of Kabul last year, the Afghan Taliban has maintained an uneasy relationship with Islamabad. Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of providing a safe haven to armed groups, a charge denied by the Taliban. Pakistan was among a handful of nations to recognize the first Taliban government when it came to power in Afghanistan in the late 1990s. As far as their official recognition of the Taliban government is concerned, Pakistan would not want to take a solo flight and would rather pursue this process with international consensus.

## TTP Declares End To Truce, Orders Attacks Across Pakistan

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/ttp-declares-end-to-truce-orders-attacks-across-pakistan/ar-AA14E8EV?ocid=msedgdhp&pc=U531&cvid=1762b13439c74e00ada2bb54d00c81e3>

In a major blow for Pakistan, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) declared an end to the ceasefire with the Pakistani government and issued nationwide attacks. The TTP, also known as the Pakistan Taliban, announced this decision through a statement. This decision by the TTP comes even as Pakistan is facing regular attacks in its tribal areas and along the Durand Line – its border with Afghanistan – from the Afghan Taliban and insurgents linked to the Pakistan Taliban.

### COMMENTS

TTP, a separate entity to the Taliban in Afghanistan but sharing a similar Islamist ideology and demands the rule of Sharia across the Pakistan. TTP is responsible for dozens of violent attacks and hundreds of deaths across Pakistan since emerging in 2007. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan projected power over vast tracts of Pakistan's western tribal belt at a time. In areas they controlled, the TTP imposed strict, radical version of Islamic law according to their interpretation. Pakistan Taliban's order to its fighters to stage attacks across Pakistan is sure to strain Pakistani security apparatus. A high-valued TTP commander was killed along with ten other militants in a fierce gun battle during an encounter in northwest Pakistan, in the restive Lakki Marwat district bordering South Waziristan tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

TTP main demands include the revocation of the Pakistan Government's decision to merge the erstwhile tribal districts bordering Afghanistan into the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and the release of detained group members.

Pakistan is also battling a severe economic crisis which has been compounded by the recent massive floods which had affected around a third of the impoverished country. An assertive Afghan Taliban is unwilling to accept any 'one-sided' change in the status quo ante on the Durand Line issue. Border tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have reached an unprecedented level after recent clashes along the so-called Durand Line. One year after the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, border clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan have increased manifold with no thaw in sight anytime soon. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

## 26th Edition of 'Exercise Malabar' Among Navies of Quad Countries Comes to an End

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/26th-edition-of-exercise-malabar-among-navies-of-quad-countries-comes-to-an-end-8275002/>

The 26th edition of the Quadrilateral Maritime drill, Exercise Malabar among the Navies of the Quad countries India, the United States, Japan and Australia culminated in the seas off the coast of Japan on Tuesday. The exercise aimed at cooperation in the strategically significant Indo-Pacific region was hosted by the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) this time. The Indian Navy was represented by Eastern Fleet, led by its Flag Officer Commanding, Rear Admiral Sanjay Bhalla. The Indian contingent was represented by stealth multirole frigate INS Shivalik and Anti-Submarine corvette INS Kamorta. Malabar series of exercises began in 1992, a maritime drill between Navies of India and the US. In 2015, the JMSDF joined Exercise Malabar as a permanent member. The 2020 edition witnessed the participation of the Royal Australian Navy. The last edition the 25th one was hosted by the US Navy in the Western Pacific.

### COMMENTS

The sea phase of Exercise Malabar 2022 was conducted over a period of five days near Yokosuka and witnessed live weapon firings, surface, Anti-Air and Anti-Submarine warfare drills and tactical procedures. Another highlight of the sea phase was the conduct of 'War at Sea' exercise, which enabled all four Navies to consolidate interoperability and hone their tactical skills. "The high-tempo exercise saw the participation of eleven surface ships including a Nuclear Powered Aircraft Carrier with its integral air elements, along with four long-range Maritime Patrol Aircraft, integral helicopters and two submarines. The exercise also involved exchange of 'Sea Riders' between various participating ships. Apart from operational drills and exercises, the bilateral logistics support agreements between the participating countries were validated during this edition of Exercise Malabar. The exercise has helped enhance understanding of each other's operational methodologies and ability to co-operate to tackle myriad Maritime Challenges. The nations stand united in upholding international rules-based order to protect the free flow of commerce and ensure regional Maritime Security.



Source: Indian Express



## Second Project 15B Destroyer Delivered To The Indian Navy

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/11/second-project-15b-destroyer-delivered-to-the-indian-navy/>

The contract for four ships of Project 15B was signed on 28 January 2011. This Project is a follow-on of the Kolkata class (Project 15A) destroyers commissioned in the last decade and the lead ship of the Project – INS Visakhapatnam has already been commissioned into the Indian Navy on 21 November 2021. Designed by the Warship Design Bureau, the Indian Navy's in-house organization; and built by M/s Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd, Mumbai; the four ships of the Project are christened after major cities from all four corners of the country, viz. Vishakhapatnam, Mormugao, Imphal and Surat.

### COMMENTS



Source: Naval News

The keel of Mormugao was laid in June 2015 and the ship was launched on 17 September 2016. The design has largely maintained the hull form, propulsion machinery, many platform equipment and major weapons and sensors as the Kolkata class to benefit from series production. The ship is 163 meters long and 17 meters wide, displaces 7400 tonnes when fully loaded, and has a maximum speed of 30 knots. Apart from myriad indigenous equipment in the 'Float' and 'Move' categories, the destroyer is also installed with the under-mentioned major indigenous weapons. The overall indigenous content of the project is approx. 75%.

- Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (BEL, Bangalore)
- BrahMos Surface-to-Surface Missiles (BrahMos Aerospace, New Delhi)
- Indigenous Torpedo Tube Launchers (Larsen & Toubro, Mumbai)
- Anti-Submarine Indigenous Rocket Launchers (Larsen & Toubro, Mumbai)
- 76mm Super Rapid Gun Mount (BHEL, Haridwar)

The delivery of Mormugao is an affirmation of the impetus being given by the Government of India and the Indian Navy towards 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' as part of the celebration of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'. The early induction of the destroyer, almost 03 months prior to the contractual date, despite the COVID challenges, is a tribute to the collaborative efforts of a large number of stakeholders and would enhance the maritime prowess of the country in the Indian Ocean Region.



## Istanbul Naval Shipyard Launches MILGEM Corvette “PNS KHAIBAR” for Pakistan Navy

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/11/istanbul-naval-shipyard-launches-milgem-corvette-pns-khaibar-for-pakistan-navy/>

On 25 Nov 22, the PN MILGEM-class corvette PNS Khaibar (282) was ceremonially launched for the Pakistan Navy at Turkiye's Istanbul Naval Shipyard. "Khaibar" is the third corvette under construction but is expected to be the second ship delivered. Three important events took place at the Istanbul Naval Shipyard. The primary event was the launching of the third PN MILGEM corvette for the Pakistan Navy, the future PNS Khaibar (282). Following the ceremony, the keel of the first Hisar-class offshore patrol vessel, the future TCG Akhisar (P-1220), was laid and the first steel of the second OPV (P-1221 – TCG Kochisar) was cut. The ceremony was attended by high-ranking representatives of both countries. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was the chief guest at the ceremony, while Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sherif and Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, as well as high-ranking officers of the two Navies, were the other guests. In his speech, President Erdogan highlighted Turkish-Pakistani relations in the field of defence industry in recent years. He also stated that Turkey will realize significant developments in the defence industry within the next year.

### COMMENTS



*Source: Naval News*

PN MILGEM Program consists of 4 ships, 2 ships will be built in Istanbul Shipyard Command and 2 ships will be built in KSEW. The program started on 11 March 2019. The deliveries of the ships, which will be able to perform all kinds of military duties from air defense to submarine defense, are expected to be made at six-month intervals starting from August 2023. The exact configuration of the Pakistan Milgem-class ships has not been made public yet. During the Aman Naval Exercise held in February 2019, Admiral Abbasi said that Pakistan ships will be fitted with a 16-Cell VLS behind the main gun.

## MARITIME

It is expected that the Babur-class corvettes will be armed with MBDA's Albatros NG air defence system and Harbah Anti-ship and land attack missiles. The propulsion system for all the MILGEM ships consist of one LM2500 gas turbine in a combined diesel and gas turbine configuration with two diesel engines; total propulsion power is 31,600 kilowatts. Turkey's Ada-class are multipurpose corvettes able to conduct a wide a range of missions, including reconnaissance, surveillance, anti-submarine warfare, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air warfare.

### Key data:

- Displacement: 2,926 tonnes
- Length: 108.2 m
- Beam: 14.8 m
- Draft: 4.05 m
- Propulsion: CODAG
- Max speed: 31 knots
- Range: 3500 nautical miles
- Endurance: 15 days at sea
- Crew: 93+40

The 4th corvette of the PN MILGEM project is likely to be delivered to Pakistan in February 2025. After the launching ceremony, the keel of the lead vessel of the Hisar-class OPV was laid, and the construction of the second OPV has officially begun. In July 2018, a contract was signed between the Military Factory and Shipyard Management Corporation (**ASFAT**) of Turkey and the Pakistani National Defense Ministry Ammunition Production and Karachi Shipyard for the construction of four Milgem class vessels based on Turkish Ada-class design. This deal can be described as the largest defense export of Turkey in one agreement. The contract entails the construction of two corvettes in Turkey and two at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works (KS&EW). The contract has also provisions for the transfer of design rights and construction know-how from Turkey to Pakistan.

## North Korea Aims to Have ‘World’s Strongest’ Nuclear Force, Kim Says

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/kim-jong-un-says-north-koreas-goal-is-for-worlds-strongest-nuclear-force/article66190649.ece>

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has said that his ultimate goal is to possess the world’s most powerful nuclear force, according to state media.

Kim made the announcement on Saturday as he promoted dozens of military officers involved in the recent launch of North Korea’s largest ballistic missile, the Hwasong-17, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.



*Source: Reuters*

### COMMENTS

Kim Jong Un, the Supreme Leader of North Korea, has once again demonstrated that his country has secure and reliable nuclear weapons that are capable of sparking a nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, similar to the one that occurred in 2017, after the successful launch of its Hwasong-17 ICBM, on November 18.

The North Korean Supreme Leader’s strategic ambitions have been conveyed by his state media. Kim has displayed the typical North Korean behaviour to provoke the US and South Korea as a counter-aggression to their policies. The statement was released by KCNA only after the US had flown its Supersonic B-1B Air bombers in response to the acclaimed success of Hwasong-17.

The Supreme Leader’s premise for wanting to possess the world’s strongest nuclear weapons can be viewed from two vantage points. First, North Korea’s Nuclear policies have gained momentum, especially since 2011, after Kim Jong Un assumed leadership. Despite multiple sanctions, global criticism and a depleting economy, he has continued to pursue the desire of making North Korea a great nuclear power. At the start of 2022, North Korea recorded a few failures in the initial test launches, but the scenario changed when ICBMs were successfully tested.

## NORTH KOREA

The recent missile tests, especially the impressive numbers captured in testing Hwasong-17 are an indication of Kim Jong Un's message to the US to give up hopes of North Korean denuclearization.

Apart from that, the developments in North Korea's pursuit of nuclear and missile policies are to assert its increasing deterrence capacity. If the capabilities released by KCNA for Hwasong-17 stand true, it can go beyond Guam in the US. North Korean denuclearization cannot materialize under Kim's watch, even if that means destabilizing the Korean peninsula and leading to short escalations by either of the party parties involved.

Second, the development of nuclear weapons and missiles is intrinsic to North Korea's state ideology of 'Juche'. Nuclear weapons hold a domestic value and

the actualization of the same portrays how nuclear weapons are in tandem with its state ideology. In September 2022, North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un passed a new nuclear law updating its existing nuclear doctrine. The new law emphasized a pre-emptive strike by North Korea and 'no giving up of nukes or denuclearization'. North Korea's nuclear activities remain to be one of the multiple premises for fulfilling the ideology of 'Juche'.

The tests and the new indoctrinated nuclear policy serve as a reminder that Kim Jong Un is steering North Korea to process the ball moving on the nuclear front, all when the world has placed its stakes either on Ukraine or Taiwan. The US, South Korea and Japan can pursue pragmatic solutions if aimed at de-nuclearization, but the bigger question that endures is whether North Korea will easily give up its nuclear and missile possessions, especially with Kim Jong Un's determination to possess the world's most powerful weapons.

## China's Xi, In Message To North Korea's Kim, Says Willing To Work Together For Regional, Global stability -KCNA

**<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinas-xi-message-north-koreas-kim-says-willing-work-together-regional-global-2022-11-25/>**

Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un that China would be willing to work together with North Korea for regional and global peace, stability and prosperity, North Korea's state media KCNA reported on Saturday, citing Xi's letter to Kim.

KCNA did not mention North Korea's recent missile launches that have heightened tensions around the Korean peninsula following joint military drills between South Korea and the United States.

### COMMENTS

China and North Korea have shared an odd relationship vis-à-vis the latter's nuclear programs. In the past few months, North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un has rapidly expanded the country's missile and nuclear capabilities, sending waves of distress and concern for the Korean peninsula and beyond.

In order to adhere to nuclear regulations and foster compliance with the same, China has been imposing never stopped putting sanctions on Kim's dictatorship. But North Korea was able to continue its pursuit of nuclear weapons and missile testing, largely fairly because of the border trade with China, which has remained unaffected even after strong sanctions. China's interest in North Korea is economic, which has ensured that Kim Jong Un and his country do not collapse. While there was a time when China had outrightly extended its support to North Korea, with recent but with policy changes, it has somewhat conclusively become a 'qualified' supporter, maintaining an equally cordial relationship South of the DMZ.

Nonetheless, in recent times, China, together with Russia, has vetoed UNSC resolutions condemning North Korea for continued nuclearization.

China's interest in North Korea is mainly because it still views North Korea as an instrument to disrupt US intervention in the Korean Peninsula. The geopolitics of the region witnessed a shift after South Korea elected Yoon Suk Yeol as the new President, who has come in staunch support of US persuasions for North Korea's denuclearization, much unlike former South Korean President Moon Jae In.

Equivalently, China has never been a supporter of Korean Unification since the time of the Korean War and it would be a loss for China to let loose its grip on North Korea at a time when US unipolarity is being challenged.

President Xi's proposed 'regional peace' cannot be attained independently, particularly when Kim Jong Un has been pursuing a robust nuclear and missile policy, pulling multiple stakeholders like the US into the region. China has to keep in mind that the 'proposed regional peace' cannot happen without involving the US, Russia and South Korea. The possibility of a consensus between all these countries remains bleak, in light of the present geopolitical tensions. However, positive affirmations were seen during the Biden-Xi meeting on 14th November 2022, wherein North Korea's 'provocative behaviour' was highlighted and discussed by the two leaders.

The North Korean dilemma needs to be solved through 'constructive and pragmatic' solutions involving all stakeholders that have been vocal on the agenda and China's peace proposal can be considered as one step towards the same, but the actualization of the same remains ambiguous.