



CENTRE FOR
JOINT WARFARE
STUDIES
(CENJOWS)

GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

1 - 1 5 J A N U A R Y 2 0 2 3

**U.S. And
Japan Agree
To Step Up
Security
Cooperation
Amid China
Worries**

*Giant Chinese
Drone Carrying AI
Ship Enters Service
as Research Vessel*

**CHINA RENEWS
THREAT
AGAINST
TAIWAN AS
ISLAND HOLDS
DRILLS**

**Pakistan: Protests Rock
PoK As Gilgit Baltistan
Demands Reunion With
India**

**China, Philippines
Commit To Peaceful
South China Sea
Solution**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 CHINA
Brig (Dr)
RK Bhutani (Retd)

04 RUSSIA-UKRAINE
CONFLICT & CAR
Gp Capt
A Mathur (Retd)

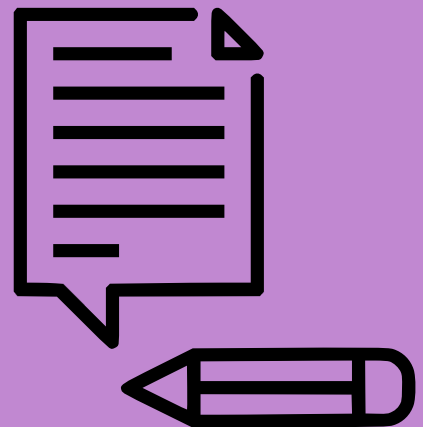
08 USA
Gp Capt
Puneet Bhalla

12 PAKISTAN AND SRI LANKA
Col DM Govil

17 NEPAL
Col VN Shukla

19 MARITIME
Cdr Naveen Pandita

21 JAPAN/ INDO-PACIFIC
Ms Ulupi Borah



China Reports Huge Rise In Covid-related Deaths After Data Criticism

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20221229-global-alarm-grows-over-china-s-covid-surge>

China said on 14 January nearly 60,000 people with Covid-19 had died in hospital since it abandoned its zero-COVID policy last month, a huge increase from previously reported figures that follows global criticism of the country's corona virus data.

COMMENTS

In early December, Beijing abruptly dismantled its strict three-year anti-virus regime of frequent testing, travel curbs and mass lockdowns after widespread protests in late November, and cases have surged since then. Between December 8 and January 12, the number of COVID-related deaths in Chinese hospitals totaled 59,938. According to Chinese official records, of those fatalities, 5,503 were caused by respiratory failure due to COVID and the remainder resulted from a combination of COVID and other diseases.

While international health experts have predicted at least 1 million COVID-related deaths this year, China had previously reported just over 5,000 deaths since the pandemic began, one of the lowest death rates in the world.

Authorities had been reporting five or fewer deaths a day over the past month - figures inconsistent with long queues seen at funeral homes and body bags seen leaving crowded hospitals. The World Health Organization said this week that China was heavily under-reporting deaths from COVID, although it was now providing more information on its outbreak.

Last month, a Chinese health expert at a government news conference said only deaths caused by pneumonia and respiratory failure after contracting COVID would be classified as COVID deaths. Heart attacks or cardiovascular disease causing the death of infected people would not get that classification.

The tenfold increase in deaths announced on Saturday suggests that China's COVID policy reversal "is indeed associated with" a sharp rise in severe cases and deaths, especially among older people. In the countryside, for example, many elderly people died at home but were not tested for COVID due to the lack of access to test kits or their unwillingness to get tested.

Further, it is unclear whether the new data accurately reflects actual fatalities because doctors are discouraged from reporting COVID-related deaths and the numbers include only deaths in hospitals. Jiao, the Chinese health official, said the number of patients needing emergency treatment was declining and the share of patients at fever clinics who tested positive for Covid-19 was steadily falling as well. The number of severe cases has also peaked, she added, though they remained at a high level, and patients are mostly elderly.

CHINA

A sharp rise in travel ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday, when hundreds of millions return home from cities to small towns and rural areas, has fuelled worry that it will bring a surge in cases during a celebration that begins on January 21.

This week, the WHO warned of risks stemming from holiday travel. China reopened its borders on January 8.

Despite worries about infections, air passenger volumes in China have recovered to 63 per cent of 2019 levels since the annual travel season began on Jan. 7, the industry regulator said on Friday.

China Renews Threat Against Taiwan As Island Holds Drills

<https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/international/2023/01/11/fgn36-china-taiwan-ld-threat.html>

China renewed its threats on 11 January, to attack Taiwan and warned that foreign politicians who interact with the self-governing island are “playing with fire.”



Source: The Global Times

COMMENTS

China views Taiwan as a Chinese territory that must be brought under Beijing's control, by force if necessary. A string of visits in recent months by foreign politicians to Taiwan, including by then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and numerous politicians from the European Union, spurred displays of military might from both sides.

This week, Taiwan's military is staging drills intended to reassure the public of its ability to counter China's threats ahead of this month's Lunar New Year holiday. ***The drills coincide with a visit from German and Lithuanian lawmakers — the latter Baltic state being a particular target of Chinese ire for upgrading its ties with Taiwan.***

China has responded to foreign visits by holding large-scale military exercises seen by some as a rehearsal for a blockade or invasion. Beijing sends airplanes and warships toward Taiwan on a near-daily basis, often crossing the midline of the 160 kilometer (100 miles) Taiwan Strait dividing the sides. At the end of December, China sent a record 71 planes and seven ships toward Taiwan — the largest such scale exercise in 2022.

CHINA



China's efforts to isolate the island diplomatically have left Taiwan with just 14 official diplomatic partners, although it retains robust unofficial relations with key ally the U.S. and more than 100 nations around the world.

Source: Nikkei Asia

Taiwan considers these drills as essential to maintain the safety of its airspace and national security. China's spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office Ma Xiaoguang said the country was recommitted in the New Year to "safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity" and "smashing plots for Taiwan independence".

He further added, "The malicious support for Taiwan independence among anti-China elements in a few foreign countries are a deliberate provocation."

The Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

- **Ukrainian Attacks: Source: Indian Express. 04 Jan2023.** <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/ukraine-strikes-russia-massive-blow-three-takeaways->
- **Ukraine-Russia Conflict Status: Reuters :Wednesday, December 21, 2022Supply of Bradley Vehicles; Source: Time: <https://time.com/6245649/us-bradleys-vehicles-ukraine/> & (Source:<https://pdf.indianexpress.com/pdfupload/subepaper/ie-delhi-15-01-2023.pdf>)**
- **Counter Attack by Russia (Source:<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/14/russia-ukraine-war-latest-updates>)**

Scenario:

- **Ukrainian Attack:** Ukrainian forces used American-made M142 HIMARs, which are satellite-guided weapons with a range of about 50 miles, to reduce to rubble a large building housing Russian troops in the city of Makiivka in Donetsk oblast in the Donbas on December 31, killing at least 63 Russian soldiers.
- **New Weapons :** Ukraine will get a major delivery of armoured fighting vehicles from the West, following a deal last week that saw the U.S., France, UK and Germany agree to send them. The details are:

(a) America would supply Bradley armoured vehicles. In addition, RIM-7 "Sea Sparrow" missiles, ship-based anti-aircraft missiles that will be rigged to work with the Soviet-era Buk ground-based system along with 4,000 Zuni aircraft rockets that can be fitted to Ukraine's aircraft and helicopters. The Pentagon has already sent short-range, inexpensive and unguided anti-tank weapons that are classified as rockets to Ukraine which are often older rocket designs upgraded to have guidance systems and movable fins on their nose to steer them, and, the longer-range Javelin, which is a guided missile.

(b) Germany said they are sending Marder fighting vehicles, a Patriot anti-aircraft missile battery to help Ukraine withstand an onslaught of Russian missiles and drones. Germany has earlier given Ukraine howitzers, Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns and the first of four IRIS-T surface-to-air missile systems.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

(b) French AMX-10C is equipped with a large 105mm gun is a howitzer; the long barrel is in fact an artillery tube, designed to fire shells high into the air and tens of kilometres away—much farther than any tank that was designed to take on Soviet tanks of the 1980s, will be supplied.

(d) On 14 Jan 2023, UK's PM Rishi Sunak made the pledge to provide Challenger 2 tanks and other artillery systems.

- Russian Counter Attacks: The Ukrainian Air Force said that it had shot down 25 of the 38 rockets launched by Russian forces on 14 Jan 2023 in a “massive attack” on its infrastructure. Details of few more incidents are as under

(a) Dnipro missile attack kills at least 29 at apartment block. Ukrainian officials blamed a Russian missile attack for the most significant attack on this city. Ukraine's Air Force believes a Kh-22 missile was used in the Dnipro strike.

(b) The Kyiv blasts hit the city, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. The Ukrainian military said Russia launched “Kh-101/Kh-555, Kh-22 air-based cruise missiles, Kalibr sea-based cruise missiles, Kh-59 guided air missiles”.

(c) On the eastern front, Russia and Ukraine disputed control of the salt mining town of Soledar, a gateway to the city of Bakhmut that has become a recent focus of the fighting.

(d) Russian airstrikes landed in the regions of Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lviv, Vinnytsia and Zaporizhzhia. The Lviv regional administration, said that about 40 percent of the region, or about 300,000 homes, were without power after Saturday's attacks.

BACKGROUND

As combat has reached a stalemate with the arrival of winter, the war is entering a “grinding, attrition phase where breakthroughs are becoming harder”. There is speculation that Russia is girding itself for a new offensive, and maybe the mobilisation of more conscripts.

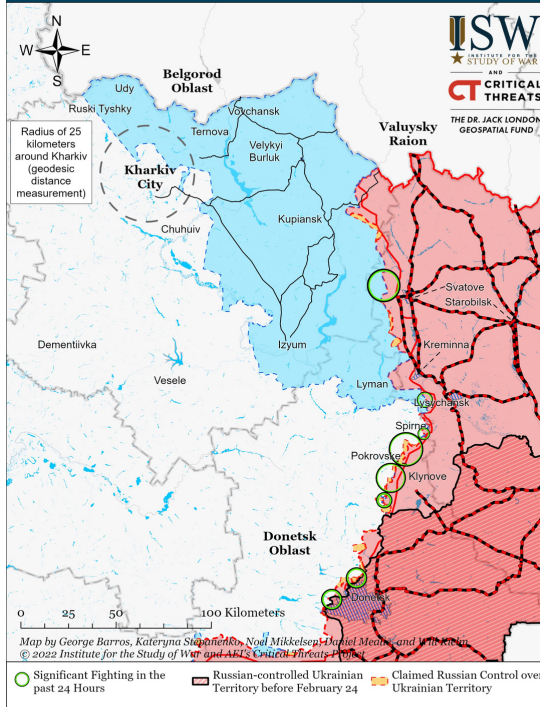


Source: Reuters

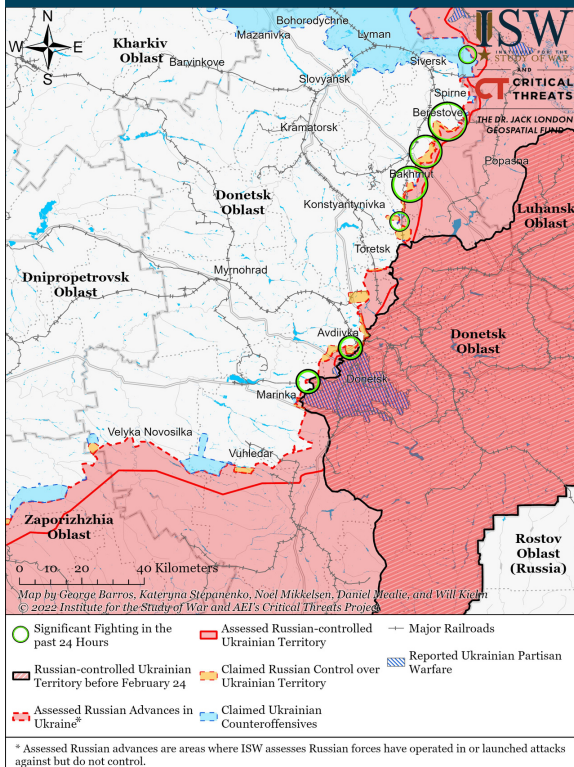
Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 2, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



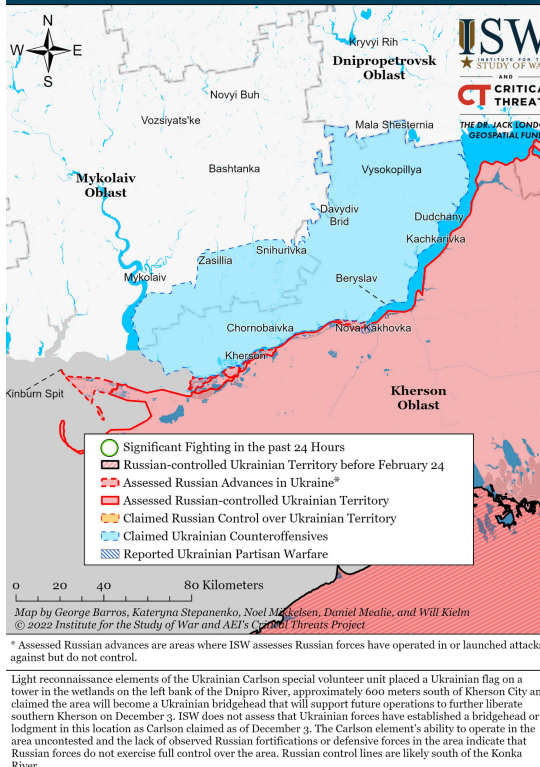
Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of January 2, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of January 2, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of January 2, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



COMMENTS

- Fighting vehicles' primary purpose is to carry troops into a secure location so they may move about the battlefield and exit when it's time to engage in combat. It can assist Ukraine in launching additional offensives where the terrain is flat and wide. Perhaps larger tanks will arrive later. Although these tools will support Ukraine, it is unlikely that they will change the battlefield's power dynamics enough to put an end to the conflict.
- HIMARS rockets have been particularly effective in fighting Russia's offensive in Donbas by allowing Ukraine to attack Russian supply and ammunition depots. They were also crucial in forcing Russia to withdraw from Kherson.
- The takeaways are:-

(i) Russia's prospects for ending the war on its terms are fading away. Russia also faces sanctions imposed by many of the world's richest and most technologically advanced countries. To prevent a direct NATO-Russia war and to ensure strategic stability, the West will need to keep lines of communication open with the Kremlin in addition to dissuading and economically and politically isolating Russia.

(ii) Germany is building six LNG terminals by the end of 2023, giving enough import capacity to meet a third of Germany's whole gas demands. This is done in an effort to minimise its use of Russian gas and keep working to cease dependency on Russian energy exports. According to economists, Russia's budget will grow too dependent on oil revenue.

(iii) The conflict in Ukraine has ruined the country's ecosystem. The fighting has poisoned large areas of Ukrainian farms. Hazardous fuels and chemicals that were released by rocket explosions and the daily firing of tens of thousands of artillery shells by both sides have seeped into the ground throughout the length of the front line, and this contamination can ruin regional ecosystems and agriculture.

U.S. And Japan Agree To Step Up Security Cooperation Amid China Worries

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-increase-number-anti-ship-missiles-japan-sources-2023-01-11/>

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada as part of the 2023 U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee meeting at the State Department in Washington, U.S. on January 11, 2023.



Source: Reuters

After the meeting, they announced stepped-up security cooperation in the face of shared worries about China. The U.S. strongly endorsed a major military build-up announced by Tokyo last month. The joint statement said that the two countries "provided a vision of a modernized Alliance postured to prevail in a new era of strategic competition."

"We agree that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is the greatest shared strategic challenge that we and our allies and partners face," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told a joint news conference after the meeting.

The joint statement said the United States and Japan "will sharpen our shared edge on economic security, including protection and promotion of critical and emerging technologies, including semiconductors."

Blinken also said that two sides had agreed to extend the terms of their common defence treaty to cover space. Kishida, Japan's Foreign Minister Hayashi and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken later signed an agreement on peaceful space exploration at NASA's headquarters in Washington.

At the briefing, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced plans to introduce a Marine Littoral Regiment in Japan, which would bring significant capabilities, including anti-ship missiles. The joint statement said that given "a severely contested environment," the forward posture of U.S. forces in Japan should be upgraded "by positioning more versatile, resilient, and mobile forces with increased intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, anti-ship, and transportation capabilities."

The anti-ship missiles will arrive in Japan under a revamped Marine Corps regiment of 2,000 troops that will focus on advanced intelligence, surveillance and transportation, U.S. officials said. The move is expected to be completed by 2025. The officials added that a separate U.S. Army company of about 300 soldiers and 13 vessels would be deployed by this spring to help transport U.S. and Japanese troops and equipment, allowing for the rapid dispersal of forces. Austin noted ramped-up Chinese military activities near the Taiwan Strait, but said he seriously doubted they were a sign of plans for an imminent invasion of the island by Beijing. Both sides exchanged views on various issues such as achieving peace and prosperity through rules-based economic order, countering economic coercion and addressing opaque and unfair development finance, strengthening supply capacity to enable global sustainable economic growth, and promoting and securing critical and emerging technologies and critical infrastructure.

Biden Tells Kishida U.S. Strongly Supports Defense Of Japan

<https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-tells-kishida-us-strongly-supports-defense-japan-2023-01-13/>

President Joe Biden met Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House on 13 January 2023. He praised Tokyo's "historic" defence build-up announced last month. He said, "Let me be crystal clear: The United States is fully, thoroughly, completely committed to the alliance, and importantly ... to the defense of Japan," he said, while also thanking Kishida for strong leadership in working closely on technology and economic issues. He called it a "remarkable moment" in the U.S.-Japan alliance. He said the two countries had never been closer.

PM Kishida thanked President Biden for U.S. work on regional security and said: "Japan and the United States are currently facing the most challenging and complex security environment in recent history." He said Tokyo had formulated its new defence strategy released last month "to ensure peace and prosperity in the region."

"Biden commended Japan's bold leadership in fundamentally reinforcing its defense capabilities and strengthening diplomatic efforts," according to a joint U.S.-Japan statement issued after the meeting.

Biden and Kishida committed to "strengthening vital trilateral cooperation" among the United States, Japan and South Korea, said the joint statement, which follows North Korea's decision to exponentially increase its nuclear force and codify its right to a first strike.

Kishida's visit follows one by Biden to Tokyo in May and a meeting between the two at a November regional summit in Cambodia.

Japan's Kishida Says Allies Must Act In Concert On China

<https://www.reuters.com/world/japans-kishida-says-allies-must-act-concert-china-2023-01-13/>

Japan, the United States and Europe must act in unison on China, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in Washington on 13 Jan 2023, during a speech at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

On a visit aimed at enhancing Tokyo's U.S. alliance in the face of growing challenges from Beijing, Kishida said that China was the central challenge for both Japan and the United States. "It is absolutely imperative for Japan, the United States and Europe to stand united in managing our respective relationship with China," he added.

"The international community is at a historical turning point: the free, open and stable international order that we have dedicated ourselves to upholding is now in grave danger," Kishida said.

Kishida reiterated Japan's concern about China's military activities near disputed islets in the East China Sea – known as the Senkaku Islands in Japanese and the Diaoyu Islands in Chinese – as well as China's launch of ballistic missiles last year that landed in waters near Japan.

China's vision for the international order differs from the views of Japan and the United States in some ways that the allies "can never accept," Kishida said. "China needs to make a strategic decision that it will abide by established international rules and that it cannot and will not change the international order in way that are contrary to these rules," Kishida said.

Kishida said he looked forward to a "candid" exchange of views on issues including "a free and open Indo-Pacific" - language the two sides use to describe efforts to push back against China. as well as the respective priorities for the United States' APEC host year and Japan's G7 presidency.

COMMENTS

The hectic diplomatic activities between U.S. and Japan are significant, coming a month after announcement of Japan's historic reforms to his country's national security strategy, underlining Japan's away from departure from seven decades of pacifism and towards closer cooperation with U.S.' quest to constrain China. They are also important for the openly articulated confrontational approach to China. Japan's intentions of doubling its defence spending to 2% of its gross domestic product by 2027 (making Japan's military budget the third largest in the world, behind the U.S. and China), as also Japan's more active stance in protecting its interests have been welcomed by the U.S.

Japan's new strategy also calls for acquiring long-range missile systems that would enable Tokyo to reach targets in China and North Korea, to act as potential deterrents.

Japan has actively pursued these measures as it has been concerned about Chinese actions in the region, as well as belligerence of North Korea, which fired more than 90 ballistic and other missiles last year. The Japanese PM has been pushing for a larger defence role for Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. His visit to the U.S. was a culmination of a weeklong tour of some of his country's most important Western allies – France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Canada, in an attempt to make the G-7 countries focus on the region's security challenges from China and North Korea.

For the U.S., Japan remains the most important ally in the region, for it to counter China's belligerence toward Taiwan as Beijing seeks to assert its sovereignty claims over the island. Japan already hosts 18,000 U.S. Marines on its Okinawan Island, which is part of a chain that stretches along the edge of the East China Sea to within about 100 km (62 miles) of Taiwan. According to Lieutenant General James Bierman, commanding general of the U.S. Marine Corps element in Japan, both countries are rapidly integrating their command structure and scaling up combined operations. He recently cited the example of Ukraine – preparations since 2014-15 that helped the Ukrainian forces, and hinted that achieving integration with allies was important towards preparing for any future conflict in the region.

As expected, China has been quick to respond to these steps. The more diplomatically understated response by China's Foreign Ministry stated that any new forms of cooperation between the two powers should not harm the interests of any other countries in the Indo-Pacific or the region's current peace and stability. Its state-owned mouthpieces however warned that the accelerated cooperation among these allies will create new threats for themselves in the region. Citing a Chinese military analyst, the English-language Global Times newspaper warned that if Japan continued dramatic increases in military spending and new security postures coordinated with the U.S. – particularly with regard to Taiwan – then the Chinese military "is sure to take countermeasures, including holding more exercises and patrols in international waters and airspace around Japan." Some also chided Japan, stating that the new partnership "actually puts Japan in a riskier and more sacrificial position" in the region.

For India, these moves at integrated responses to Chinese hegemonic intentions are indeed positive. They add onto the Indo-Japan military initiatives are also on the upswing. The Veer Guardian 2023, the first Indo-Japanese air exercise involving combat operations, currently underway in Japan. This is in addition to the annually held Japan-India Maritime exercises and the Malabar exercise of the QUAD and the combined land exercise called Dharma Guardian in 2022. However, there is also a cautionary note, as any hindrance to Chinese designs in the South China or East China Seas in the near term could force an immediate shift of focus to its Western Theatre Area of Operations.

‘Still Open’ To A Ceasefire Agreement With Pakistan Government, Says TTP Chief

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/still-open-to-ceasefire-agreement-with-pakistan-government-says-ttp-chief/articleshow/96830190.cms>

The chief of the banned TTP has said that his group is ‘still open’ to a ceasefire agreement with the Pakistan government. In November last year, the TTP called off an indefinite ceasefire agreed with the government in June 2022, and ordered its militants to carry out attacks on the security forces. However, the dreaded outfit insisted that it has not scrapped the ceasefire agreement with the government.

TTP Challenges Pakistan's Sovereignty, Declares Own Government

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/ttp-challenges-pakistan-s-sovereignty-declares-own-government/ar>

After capturing power in Afghanistan the Taliban is intent on forming yet another government in Pakistan. In a direct challenge to the sovereignty of the Pakistan government and the country's military establishment led by the Pakistan Army, the TTP, has announced the formation of its government in northern Pakistan and has even declared the formation of various ministries. TTP has announced its new appointments dividing the outfit into various ministries, Defence, Judiciary, Information, Political affairs, Economic Affairs, Education etc.

COMMENTS

Taliban has also divided the area it claims in northern Pakistan into two provinces. A northern province comprising Gilgit, Baltistan, and other areas bordering Afghanistan. The southern province includes districts bordering Punjab. They even claim Dera Ghazi Khan which is a district in Pakistan Punjab. Following the example of the Taliban in Afghanistan, it seems the TTP harbours ambitions of one day running Islamabad. The challenge of the TTP's surging campaign of violence will pose a new headache for the Pakistani government and the military. In this simmering cauldron, the TTP's violent attacks in Islamabad and Punjab will only raise the people's ire against the Pakistan State and the army for their inability to provide security – a potentially game-changing development in an election year.

This growing security instability in Pakistan does not augur well for India or regional security. Taking advantage, Pakistan-based anti-India terror groups such as LeT and JeM will undoubtedly feel encouraged to carry out more attacks in J&K. In addition, there are reports of increased activities in several terror launchpads in PoK, especially after Pakistan's removal from the FATF Grey list in October 2022.

Moreover, army chief General Asim Munir has also signaled a hawkish approach to India through his statements and alleging India's involvement in terror-related incidents in Pakistan. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

Why the Taliban Are Mocking Pakistan And Its Army

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/why-the-taliban-are-mocking-pakistan-and-its-army/articleshow/96734807.cms>

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan recently taunted the Pakistan government by sharing on Twitter a photo of Islamabad surrendering to India after the 1971 war that led to the formation of Bangladesh. Pakistan interior minister Rana Sanaullah hinted at a possible military operation against TTP hideouts in Afghanistan.

How Support For The Afghan Taliban Has Backfired For Pakistan

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/how-support-for-the-afghan-taliban-has-backfired-for-pakistan/articleshow/96887119.cms>

The Pakistani establishment believed it had pulled off a spectacular coup in ensuring a hasty US retreat from Afghanistan, and the Taliban regaining control of Kabul in August 2021. It even worked behind the scenes to sideline the moderates within the Taliban, and the hardliners gained an upper hand in the new Afghan cabinet. But since then, it hasn't quite gone according to the script for Islamabad. Taliban haven't cooperated with Islamabad's demand of reining TTP, a group that Pakistan considers its biggest threat to internal security.

Former Prime Minister Mr Khan said that his government had controlled terrorism and was proudly leading the country towards making it one of the world's top tourism destinations. He expressed his concern over the situation at the Pakistan-Afghan border as well.

COMMENTS

The Pakistani government was instrumental in supporting the Afghanistan Taliban while US and NATO troops were in control of Kabul. After the fall of the Ashraf Ghani-led government in Afghanistan, Pakistan was one of the few countries to applaud the Taliban takeover of the war-ravaged country while hoping to reap benefits from what it regarded as a strategic victory. This strategy has not panned out for Pakistan. With Pakistan using stronger language and openly blaming the Afghan Taliban for harbouring terrorists, animosity between the two nations has increased. Pakistan security forces lost at least 282 personnel during 2022 in terrorist attacks that included IED ambushes, suicide attacks, and raids on security posts, mostly in the Pakistan-Afghan border regions.

TTP poses a huge national security threat to Pakistan state. It has a huge support base in the KPK region and Karachi, where many Pashtuns reside. Pakistan still looks forward to the Taliban's help in eliminating TTP, but to the irony, the Taliban claims the entire KPK region and rejects the colonial Durand line. From a financial standpoint, terrorism hampers the growth of business and investment as we have seen in the case of CPEC projects in Balochistan, which have been affected by attacks from Balochi fighters. After failed negotiations between the Pakistan Government with the TTP and the Afghan Taliban's limitations to help Islamabad on the issue, a military offensive is possible. Such an operation will have economic ramifications on the country's cash-strapped economy. If Pakistan wants to come out of its mess, then it must listen to Indian advice and should stop providing a haven to terrorist outfits and its leaders, take active steps to prevent the radicalization of its masses, and make efforts in improving relations with its neighboring countries to slowly march towards gradual economic growth.

Pakistan: Protests Rock PoK As Gilgit Baltistan Demands Reunion With India

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/pakistan-protests-rock-pok-as-gilgit-baltistan-demands-reunion-with-india-11960152.html>



Source: Firstpost

Furious at the discriminative policies of the Pakistan government that had exploited the region for several decades, the people of Gilgit Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) are now demanding a reunion with India. In a video that has gone viral on several social media platforms, a huge rally in Gilgit Baltistan can be seen demanding the reopening of the Kargil Road and reunion with their fellow Baltis in the Kargil district of the union territory of Ladakh in India.

COMMENTS

India has already effected a change in the status of the former state of Jammu and Kashmir by amending Article 370 of its constitution and by bifurcating the state into two Union territories with Gilgit Baltistan forming part of the UT of Ladakh. A major reason for Pakistan to keep the status of Gilgit Baltistan ambiguous till now, while at the same time exercising administrative control over it from Islamabad (and, in the process, denying the people of this region their legitimate democratic rights) is that Pakistan regards this as a part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

India has always considered the continued occupation of Gilgit Baltistan as illegal. In 1994 the Indian parliament had passed resolutions claiming both Gilgit Baltistan and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir as part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, forming an integral part of Indian territory. Despite the complexity of the sectarian issue in Gilgit-Baltistan, its roots in Pakistan's fractious religious politics, and the power games of external forces, a long-term approach to building peace is still possible. The long-term solution has to include education, political development, and equity in access to economic and social opportunities. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

COAS Asim Munir, Saudi Crown Prince Review Ways To Enhance Bilateral Ties

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1730745>

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir on Monday met Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud in Al-Ula, Madina and discussed ways to improve bilateral ties between the two countries. COAS Munir is on a week-long official visit to Saudi Arabia and UAE, the first since his appointment.

Pakistan Secures Over \$10.5 Billion In Flood Pledges

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistan-secures-over-10-5-billion-in-flood-pledges/articleshow/96886836.cms>

Pakistan has managed to secure over \$ 10.5 billion in flood pledges which would be materialized in three phases — short-term for up to one year, medium-term for up to three years, and long-term for up to five to seven years for the reconstruction of flood-affected areas. The cash-strapped nation clinched the pledges at the one-day International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan in Geneva after Pak Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif launched flood aid appeal, aimed at helping the country overcome the devastation caused due to the floods.



Source: Times Of India

COMMENTS

Pakistan faced a crippling economic crisis as the country's foreign reserves have depleted to less than \$6bn – its lowest since April 2014 – which can just cover a month of import. Inflation has been skyrocketing while the country is also dealing with the aftermath of last year's catastrophic floods that resulted in an estimated loss of more than \$30bn. Pakistan needed Saudi money to shore foreign reserves. Riyadh deposited \$3bn in November 2021. Last month, the kingdom extended the terms of the fund. Between April to November last year, Saudi Arabia has given more than \$900m in aid and \$500m for importing oil to Pakistan.

Pakistan has been teetering on the brink of default, which, in simple terms, means the country cannot pay back what it is owed and the treasury does not have sufficient money to meet its debt obligations. The Gulf nation wanted to maintain the relationship with Pakistan because the country was an important element of Saudi regional strategy. The two countries have engaged in various sectors such as economy, labour, trade, security and the fact that the current army chief went to Saudi Arabia, it is merely a continuation of a pattern.

As regards economic crisis, the Islamic Development Bank Group has pledged \$4.2 billion over three years, the World Bank has pledged \$2 billion, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has pledged \$1 billion. The European Union has pledged \$93 million, Germany has pledged \$88 million, China has pledged \$100 million, Japan has pledged \$77 million, and the Asian Development Bank has pledged \$1.5 billion. The United States Agency for International Development has pledged \$100 million, and France has pledged \$345 million. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has also pledged \$1 billion to assist Pakistan in recovery and rehabilitation efforts. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assured complete transparency in the use of funds provided by the international community.

Nepal Says it is Making Efforts to Activate SAARC

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/nepal-says-its-making-efforts-to-activate-saarc/articleshow/96835703.cms>

Nepal said it was making efforts to activate the eight member regional grouping SAARC, which has not been very effective since 2016. Speaking at a meeting of the National Concern and Coordination Committee under the National Assembly, Secretary and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bharat Raj Paudel said the SAARC could not be made effective due to lack of consensus among all member states. Nepal is trying to make it active," he was quoted as saying by My Republica newspaper.

"We are chairing the SAARC. However, there are places where processes have not progressed. This multilateralism and regionalism have certain constants. One of them is that when we formed SAARC, we agreed on a fundamental principle while defining the charter of SAARC. That means nothing moves forward until everyone agrees on a topic. Basically, it cannot be the same. The role of the chair of SAARC is nothing special. We are only one among the eight countries. That's why efforts are being made on this," Paudel said.

ADDITIONAL

SAARC created in 1985 is a regional organisation of South Asian states that comprises of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Over the years, SAARC accorded observer status to nine countries including the European Union, the US, Iran and China, making it a rather unique organisation where the number of observers outnumber the members. The 2016 SAARC Summit was to be held in Islamabad, but after the terrorist attack on an Indian Army Camp in Uri in Jammu and Kashmir on September 18 that year, India expressed its inability to participate in the summit due to "prevailing circumstances". The summit was called off after Bangladesh, Bhutan and Afghanistan also declined to participate in the Islamabad meet.



Source: Economic Times

COMMENTS

The aspect of regional co-operation amongst South Asian Nations has been below average, wherein, SAARC has been unable to ride the success story of development and welfare objectives. The age old historical ties amongst the eight SAARC members in social, economic and cultural fields have not resulted in forming an economic alliance. Close geographical, cultural and historical similarities have also failed to assist SAARC reach the desired end state. The same could be attributed to constant environment of suspicion, tension and disagreements amongst the member states on most proposals, however good. Unfortunately, due to constant regional power politics and conflicts in South Asia, the desired progress has been below par.

Currently, the major pitfalls for non functioning of SAARC identified are Lack of Political Will, Recent Developments in Afghanistan, Frosty India-Pakistan Relations and Terrorism. The SAARC Charter places an embargo on the discussion of political and other major issues and is perceived as the primary cause for all the turmoil. However, we need to keep in mind that the success of other regional organisations has only been possible due to resolution of political issues. Nepal's efforts to activate SAARC are in the right direction. Diplomacy, peace, harmony and coordination are extremely essential between the SAARC member nations to counter the existing and emerging threats and challenges prevailing in the region and become a functional regional grouping.

Sudden Surge in Russian Navy Ships and Submarines in Black Sea

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2023/01/sudden-surge-in-russian-navy-ships-and-submarines-in-black-sea>

Russian Navy ships and submarines left their base at Novorossiysk, in the Black Sea, en-masse. This is unusual and may indicate ongoing operations. Sources seen by Naval News confirm the exodus. The group included the Project 11711 Ivan Gren class landing ship and Pyotr Morgunov, the largest amphibious ship in the Black Sea. It also contained all three Project 636.3 Improved-Kilo class submarines which were present at the base. Analysis suggests that other warships were also sailing, leaving only a few warships and support vessels in the port. (Recently Pyotr Morgunov has been to carry supplies from Russia to Sevastopol following the October 8 2022 Ukrainian attack on the Kerch Bridge). Although Russia has managed some repairs, the bridge operates at limited capacity. The Russian Navy's landing ships therefore, have been pressed into service as transports. However the **simultaneous sailing of the submarines suggests that this may be more than a resupply mission.**

COMMENTS

The mass exit may be a drill to test the crew readiness or possibly a precaution against a visualised threat. The base has not, so far, been within range of Ukrainian aerial drones. On the other hand, despite its distance from Ukrainian controlled coast, Novorossiysk is within range of Ukraine's Maritime drones. Russia had already enhanced the defences at its Naval bases, warships and the submarines as they were protected by multiple floating booms. The booms should ideally provide protection against the Maritime drone attacks. The sailing out of the Fleet could also be part of an offensive operation. The reported unusual spike in Russian Navy activity is generally preceded by extensive missile strikes on Ukraine. The Improved-Kilo class submarines had been used to launch Kalibr cruise missile attacks on Ukraine in the past. They were largely withdrawn from Sevastopol in Crimea in September 2022 following Ukrainian drone attacks on the port city. The Kilo Class Submarines still return for missile loading. This does not explain the mass exodus because it would be unique for all three to be involved in a single attack and their sailing to Sevastopol to arm at the same time would not likely be conducted in such a manner. Ukrainian forces will be monitoring this sudden movement of Russian warships and submarines out of their base of Novorossiysk. The Naval base, near the Kerch Bridge, is further from Ukrainian controlled coast than the base at Sevastopol. Yet the unusual movement may be important.

The movement of Amphibious platforms along with other assets probably suggests an ambitious Amphibious Landing. They may target southwestern Ukraine to establish a land bridge to Transnistria. This Russian-supported unrecognized state is part of Moldova and borders Ukraine. It has always been understood that it is within Russia's wider war aims to add it up.

The submarines would be involved in broader intelligence or covering missions surrounding the amphibious ships. But Amphibious Landings seem unrealistic given the fate of Russian advances at the **beginning of the war but we cannot rule out some form of amphibious operation.**

Giant Chinese Drone Carrying AI Ship Enters Service as Research Vessel

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3206781/giant-chinese-drone-carrying-ai-ship-enters-service-research-vessel?>

China's first giant-AI controlled research drone carrier officially entered service on 11 Jan 23, state media reported. The Zhuhaiyun research vessel can navigate autonomously in open waters or be operated by remote control, according to a report by state broadcaster CCTV. It can carry and operate dozens of unmanned aerial, surface and underwater vehicles (UAVs, USVs and UUVs) simultaneously to monitor its surroundings and produce a data hub. The Southern Marine Science and Engineering Guangdong Laboratory, which owns and operates the vessel, conducted a sea trial on Thursday and tested the vessel's autonomous navigation capabilities including the release and recovery of drones, for 12 consecutive hours. "It has fully met the original design goals", as per Chen Dake, the head of the laboratory and a member of the Chinese Academy of Science. This year, Zhuhaiyun will be used for surveying tasks, sea patrols and survey sampling. The ship's home-developed AI system can use information from sensors and satellites to help it navigate. Operators can also remotely monitor its operations and take control, if need be.

COMMENT

The Zhuhaiyun research vessel is a 88.5 metres long vessel, width of 14 metres and a displacement of 2,100 tonnes, larger than the Chinese Navy's Type 056 frigate. It cruises at an average speed of 13 knots and it can go up to 18 knots. The vessel's power system, propulsion system, AI system and drone operation system are all made in China. It shows that the Chinese have achieved self-sufficiency in core technologies. The ship should provide an intelligent and efficient tool for solving a large number of marine science problems. In the past, China had reported the successful maiden voyage of a much smaller 200-tonne USV that also featured AI-controlled autonomous navigation technologies. The probable employability of this AI enabled platform would be restricted to near coast missions initially followed by extended deployments. The use of such a platform in combat is very unlikely till sufficient data points and envisaged roles in combat are proven during the sea trials and other fleet operations and exercises with all kinds of Naval Platforms. It appears data collection and navigation through busy straits/ areas with heavy marine traffic would be the primary focus for the Chinese Navy.

China, Philippines Commit To Peaceful South China Sea Solution

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/5/china-philippines-to-handle-south-china-sea-disputes-peacefully>



Source: East Asia Forum

China and the Philippines have agreed to set up a direct communications channel on the South China Sea and to handle disputes over the contested waterway “through peaceful means”, according to a joint statement by the two countries. The agreement on Thursday came a day after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing amid efforts to mend a relationship that has been strained by Manila’s decision in 2016 to seek an arbitral ruling on China’s expansive claims in the South China Sea.

COMMENTS

The recent talk between the Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Philippines President Marcos Jr happened in the context of the South China Sea Dispute. It has been a significant part of China’s foreign policy that it prefers to resolve its problems with other countries through bilateral means. As a part it, Beijing has established a direct line of communication with Philippines rather than involving the other claimants of the dispute like Vietnam, Indonesia, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei.

In 2016, Philippines filed an arbitration case against China. The tribunal found that China had violated the Philippines' sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone and the ruling was in favour of Philippines which later China overruled. When Philippines realised that it couldn't resist China in the South China Sea by legal means or military power, during Duterte’s tenure Manila focused on strengthening economic ties with China. Resorting to peaceful and economic means are the only ways to deal with China in the water body considering China’s military might which nowhere can be compared with Philippines.

In order to mend relations that have been strained by Manila's decision to ask for an arbitration ruling in 2016, the leaders of both the countries decided to sign a joint statement which would handle disputes over the contested waterway "through peaceful means".

China encouraged a bilateral joint statement so that there is no involvement of other ASEAN countries unlike the Declaration on the Conduct of parties (DoC) in 2002 which was signed with ASEAN and couldn't do much to solve the South China Sea dispute.

Under the agreement, both the parties, China and Philippines discussed cooperation in terms of oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea. Apart from this, China promised to increase its imports of commodities from the Philippines.

In the above backdrop, it can be seen that among all other claimants to the South China Sea dispute, Philippines was a potent contender. However, Marcos's visit to China manifests that China has the ability to deal with the other claimants of the dispute. By extending economic aid and resorting to peaceful means China has created a situation where it can refrain itself from any kind of checks or protests from the major claimants of the dispute. This eventually enables China to enlarge its influence in the South China Sea and poses a serious concern for the global strategic community including India. A huge percent of the global trade traverses through the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) of the South China Sea and if China controls these SLOCs then it will have an adverse effect on the entire global trade.