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China's Infrastructural Plan In Tibet Is 'Dual-Use' In Nature: Report

<https://theprint.in/world/chinas-infrastructural-plan-in-tibet-is-dual-use-in-nature-report/1367504/>

China's new infrastructural plan of constructing 4,000 kilometres of railway lines by 2025 and building 59 new airports and 300 helipads by 2035 will crisscross Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is 'dual-use' in nature as it will help the country to enable the rapid deployment of its forces and will fulfil Beijing's strategy of cultural assimilation of Tibet.

COMMENTS

The fast-paced growth of infrastructure in Tibet is clearly to serve the People's Republic of China's (PRCs) ambitious goal. The plan is to build a railway network of 5,000 km or more, including 1,000 km of double-track railway lines in TAR by 2035 under its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). Currently, TAR has only three railway lines in operation: the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, which opened in July 2006, the Lhasa-Shigatse Railway, which opened in 2014, and the Lhasa-Nyingtri Railway, opened in 2021. Reportedly, TAR had 1,359 kilometres of railway lines in operation as of the end of 2021.

The railway network, however, will cover all prefecture- and city-level administrative regions in TAR and provide convenient access to Xinjiang, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, and other neighbouring provinces, as well as major land ports along the border, according to the report. The TAR also intends to build an international railway corridor to South Asia in order to open the international railway channel between China and South Asian countries



Source: Global Times

Major new railway lines scheduled to open by 2025 include the section between Ya'an in Sichuan Province and Nyingtri city in TAR of the Sichuan-Tibet Railway, the section between Shigatse and Pelku Lake in TAR of the Xinjiang-Tibet Railway, and the section and County to Ranwu Lake of the Yunnan-Tibet Railway, as per the report in Tibet Right Collective.

China claimed that since the 1990s, the government of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has made "an unprecedented scale of investment in infrastructure build-up in Tibet, specifically in the areas of connectivity such as railways, roads and airports". Investments were also made in Tibet to build hydro-power energy, for urbanization, mining, tourism, military and government infrastructure. These massive investments in infrastructure build-up are in fact, a Chinese strategy to strengthen its control over the region that it unlawfully invaded and occupied.

CHINA

According to the Tibet Policy Institute, China hoped that this infrastructural strategy will help in crushing all the expressions of dissent, and they will ultimately subdue and disintegrate the resistance of the Tibetans within and outside of Tibet. Cities in Tibet like Lhasa, due to the influx of Chinese migrant workers along with the rapid urbanisation are seeing a growing trend of intermarriage between Tibetans and Chinese.

Chinese Spy Balloon: A New Vehicle Of Global Espionage?

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/chinese-spy-balloon-a-new-vehicle-of-global-espionage/articleshow/97772071.cms>

The high-altitude Chinese balloon that crossed over the US last week is just part of a years-long surveillance program with Beijing deploying such craft around the globe. There has been a renewed scrutiny on Beijing's spy operations since the US shot down the Chinese balloon last weekend.

COMMENTS

According to US officials and reports, China has been running covert spying operations across continents for many years and the high-altitude device — which crossed directly over at least one sensitive US military site — was intended for espionage. Though, China has angrily denied the claims, arguing it was a weather observation craft that blew off course. In fact, a second Chinese balloon was spotted over Latin America last week, which Beijing said was meant for "civilian use".



Source: Firstpost

Chinese Spy Balloons have been operating over Five Continents and according to the US, they are similar to the one shot down last week. 'US is Not the Only Target'

Why Balloons?

According to experts, the balloons have some advantages over the satellites that orbit the earth in regular patterns. They fly closer to the ground and can evade radar. Kaymont, a US firm that makes and distributes weather balloons globally, said the balloon was likely made of plastic film, not latex.

Some officials said they are part of an effort by China to hone its ability to gather data about American military bases in the event of a conflict.

CHINA

India has to take note of the capabilities of these surveillance balloons deployed by China and there should be cross-sharing of data not only with and from the US but also with other members of the QUAD. Necessary actions and SOPs need to be evolved to counter/ neutralize such threats.

The balloon surveillance capabilities have brought the focus back on China's activities of stealing data through cyber espionage and using apps like TikTok, the hugely popular video app that is owned by Beijing-based ByteDance. The US for years has taken action against Chinese tech giant Huawei, alleging that it has the capacity to facilitate spying, a claim the company vigorously denies. Last month, the Biden administration stopped approving renewal of licenses to some US companies that have been selling essential components to the Chinese company.

China's Mega-Rich Move Their Wealth, And Partying, To Singapore

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/chinas-mega-rich-move-their-wealth-and-partying-to-singapore/articleshow/97593558.cms>

Singapore is seeing an influx of ultra-wealthy families from China looking to protect their wealth from a Communist Party that increasingly views them with suspicion. Beijing's recent crackdowns on tech billionaires and tax-shy celebrities, as well as three years of zero-Covid, have led many rich Chinese to look for a safe haven. Nervous over the fate of their fortunes, some of the country's mega-rich have since booked tickets to Singapore.

COMMENTS

Singapore has been ruled by one party for the past six decades, and labour strikes and street protests are banned. Taxes are comparatively low and the population is predominantly ethnic Chinese.

The presence of recent Chinese arrivals is keenly felt in Singapore, with some relocating to luxury homes with waterfront views on Sentosa Island, which also houses a theme park, a casino and a prestigious golf club. The new arrivals drive Rolls Royces and Bentleys, and are often spotted at top-tier golf clubs such as the exclusive Sentosa Golf Club, where foreign members pay \$670,000 a year.

Relocating to Singapore puts the wealth of China's richest beyond the reach of Beijing, whose recent high-profile crackdowns have rattled billionaires.

CHINA

Jack Ma, one of the most recognizable faces in Asian business, lost an estimated \$25 billion when Chinese regulators pulled the plug on a blockbuster IPO in 2020. Other Chinese tycoons fear the Communist Party could apply similar pressure or even take over their businesses at low prices.

Moving to Singapore is about making sure the family wealth is kept safe and can last for several generations. Singapore is increasingly viewed as a home rather than just a backup plan.

One of the founders of China's largest hotpot chain, Haidilao, recently set up a so-called family office in Singapore.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore estimates that the number of family offices -- wealth management companies dedicated to individual and group assets -- rose from 400 in 2020 to 700 in 2021. According to another estimate, 1,500 family offices would have been set up by the end of last year.

Various analysts consider that the outflow is expected to continue even though China's strict zero-Covid policy and curbs have now been lifted. Political tensions between Beijing and Washington are reinforcing the desire of some of China's richest to move abroad. The city-state has deftly managed its relations with Washington and Beijing, maintaining close security ties with the United States while preserving robust trade links with China.



Source: Yahoo News

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

- <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2023/02/09/> and The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/02/03/ukraine-is-not-about-to-join-the-eu?>
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- <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zelenskiy-vows-changes-will-bolster-ukraine-amid-defence-minister-uncertainty-2023-02>
- [https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/russia-says-it-will-cut-oil-production-over-western-caps/](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/russia-says-it-will-cut-oil-production-over-western-caps/article-show) article show

SCENARIO

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was hosted at a joint summit with the EU on February 03, 2023. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, Charles Michel, and Joseph Borrell, in addition to 15 other EU leaders, attended the summit. The EU reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised boundaries in a joint statement. The goal of the conference was to boost support for Ukraine, demonstrate its ability to use diplomacy to keep Russia away from escalation of the war, Ukraine's EU candidature, and world food security.

After promising tanks to Ukraine, America and its allies are now training and outfitting entire armoured divisions for manoeuvre combat. The objective is to assist Ukraine in regaining lost ground as well as fending off the upcoming Russian offensive. The next requirements by Ukraine is long range weapons and fighters to hit deep into Russian territory.

Russian Counter Attacks

In a fresh missile attack, Russia hit power infrastructure in cities across Ukraine, including Kyiv, the capital. Russia had hit power facilities in six regions with missiles and drones, causing blackouts across most of Ukraine. Moscow's main recent focus has been Bakhmut, a small city from and surrounding areas had come under fresh tank, mortar and artillery fire. Russian forces had made some advances near Vuhledar, a Ukrainian-held bastion that has been a linchpin between the southern and eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, collectively known as the Donbas. Russia has used Tu-95 strategic bombers and ships to fire cruise missiles, S-300 along with Shahed drones.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister, Alexander Novak, said that the country would cut its oil output by around 500,000 barrels a day in response to Western sanctions. On Feb 10, 2023 the EU banned the seaborne import of Russian diesel, having already done so for crude oil. The Group of Seven (G7) major democracies have imposed a USD 60-per-barrel price cap on Russian oil flowing to the world to prevent price spikes, while limiting Russian financial gains to pay for its campaign against Ukraine. Meanwhile, the oil prices rose on Mr Novak's announcement.



Source: *The Strait Times*

COMMENTS

Russia is alarmed by the NATO membership and expanding EU ties of Ukraine efforts to join the EU or NATO has been the reason for the conflict. Although NATO's military, humanitarian, and intelligence expectations have been fulfilled in a reasonable timeframe, the sanctions against Russia and its economic impact remains to be seen. A frozen conflict allows Russia time to dig in, reinforce its lines and prepare for a fresh assault, or the permanent occupation of its new acquisitions. About 17% of Ukraine's land is still under Russian control, including Crimea.

Ukraine therefore needs to keep pushing back, and to plan for the launch of its third big counter-offensive. Perhaps, prior to the next round of Russian mobilisation, Ukraine is getting ready to undertake a spring attack to retake lost ground. The fighting season in the spring could be pivotal, now that the Kremlin has mobilised 200,000–300,000 soldiers.

Despite being bolstered, Ukraine now has the challenge of controlling a dizzying array of weapons from different countries. Coordinating armour, infantry, engineers, and drones in mutually supportive ways is necessary for combined-arms operations. The implications of drone use in this conflict are likely to be long-standing, far-reaching, and multidimensional. Both sides have used stand-off strikes using expendable platforms as munitions. Both sides have taken pot shots at each other along the front lines from extremely low altitudes, but neither side can marshal decisive combat power in the air.

Russia's oil exports, which last year counted for more than 10% of globally traded volumes, took a hit after Europe's embargo in December. Two months on, though, the volume of oil on trade have recovered to levels last seen in June 2022. Many Western analysts have believed over the past year that the conflict in Ukraine represents a geopolitical turning point, uniting not only the US and its allies but also a larger liberal coalition to defeat Russian aggression.

US Expanding Cooperation With India To Address Global Challenges: Blinken

<https://www.thestatesman.com/world/us-expanding-cooperation-with-india-to-address-global-challenges-blinken-1503151707.html>

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken met India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval during an official visit to Washington from January 30-February 1. The Indian NSA also met with US NSA Jake Sullivan, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, Acting Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks, key Senators and industry leaders. As per India's Ministry of External Affairs, during this visit, both sides exchanged views on a wide range of global and regional issues of mutual interest and agreed to maintain sustained attention to achieve outcome-oriented deliverables within definitive timelines.

Doval and Sullivan co-chaired the inaugural meeting of the initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) at the White House on January 31. The Indian entourage included the Ambassador of India to the United States, Principal Scientific Advisor, Secretary, Department of Telecommunications, Chairman of ISRO, Scientific Advisor to the Defence Minister, Director General, DRDO, and other senior officials from National Security Council Secretariat and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. From the US side, NASA Administrator, Director, National Science Foundation (NSF), Deputy National Security Advisor, amongst others participated.

iCET aims to position the two countries as trusted technology partners by building technology value chains and supporting the co-development and co-production of items. It also aims to address regulatory restrictions, export controls and mobility barriers through a standing mechanism. During the launch, a new Implementation Arrangement between the Department of Science and Technology of India and the National Science Foundation of the US was signed by the Ambassador and NSF Director.

The US side has assured support to ease export barriers to India in a few critical areas, including through efforts towards legislative changes. At the launch, emphasis was placed on strengthening linkages between the startup ecosystems and building innovation bridges in key sectors between the two countries, through expos, hackathons and pitching sessions, as per the press release.

- Considering the importance of quantum technologies, the two sides established a quantum coordination mechanism with participation from industry and academia, the Ministry of External Affairs said in the press release.
- In the field of semiconductors, the US supported the development of a fabrication ecosystem

In India and encouraged joint ventures and partnerships for mature technology nodes and advanced packaging. It was agreed to constitute a task force involving India's Semiconductor Mission, India Electronics Semiconductor Association (IESA) and the US Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) to develop a "readiness assessment" to identify near-term opportunities and facilitate longer-term development of semiconductor ecosystems, according to the press release.

- In the defence manufacturing sector, India and US agreed to focus on joint production of key items of mutual interest. The US committed to an expeditious review of the license application submitted by M/s General Electric to produce jet engines in India for the indigenously manufactured Light Combat Aircraft. A new Innovation Bridge will be established to connect defence startups on both sides.
- In the field of space, there was an appreciation of the opportunities offered by the opening up of India's space sector and the contribution of India's space tech companies to the United States. Both sides agreed that ISRO will work with NASA on human space flight opportunities, NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) project and STEM talent exchanges.
- In next generation telecommunications, given India's cost-competitiveness and scale, both sides agreed to launch a public-private dialogue covering 5G/6G and ORAN using trusted sources.

COMMENTS

NSA Ajit Doval's visit to the U.S. was to take forward the iCET initiative announced by the U.S. President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in May 2022 in Tokyo. The significance of emerging technology on the global security landscape and its broad coverage has made the two countries decide on their national security advisors spearheading this initiative. This is another significant step in the steadily progressing relations between the two countries in the last decade and a half, even as U.S. has become more accommodating towards India's national interests.

Even though both nations continue to deny it, China is central to this initiative. Both nations have interest in strengthening Indian technology capability as a regional power, even as China continues to make significant progress in these technologies. While the U.S. has based its commitments on creation of 'a democratic technology ecosystem' that 'reinforces our democratic values and our democratic institutions', the initiative clearly aims at reducing its dependence on China for semiconductors, telecommunications parts and other important goods.



Source: The Statesman

India has well leveraged its geography, political stability and growing technological prowess, which in turn stands to benefit immensely from cooperating on critical emerging technologies with the technology leader of the world. India also stands to gain economically and socially through the establishment of technology value chains and the co-development and co-production of items.

It is planned that sub-domains of collaboration would be established for both nations under the umbrella of the defined areas. While all technologies are important, the most significant commitments are the ones related to semiconductors, development of a jet engine for the LCA and the collaboration in the human space programme, for which India has till now been dependent on Russia.

The U.S. assurances on addressing 'regulatory restrictions, export controls and mobility barriers through a standing mechanism' as also of 'efforts towards legislative changes' are especially welcome as many previous initiatives have been stalled by legislative and bureaucratic hurdles. It is in both countries' interests to expand the relationship to support their geopolitical/geostrategic/geoeconomic interests and not allow minor obstacles impede the momentum that has been achieved after much groundwork.

Myanmar Military Extends State of Emergency for Third Time

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/02/myanmar-military-extends-state-of-emergency-for-third-time/>

Myanmar's military government yesterday announced that it will extend the nationwide state of emergency for another six months, most likely delaying the sham "elections" that it was expected to hold by August. "Sovereign power of the state has been transferred to commander in chief again," acting President Myint Swe said in an announcement that was made public via reports in state run media outlets, referring to coup leader Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing. Myint Swe spoke at a meeting in the capital Naypyidaw of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), which brings together senior members of the military and government and was convened yesterday and Tuesday to assess the political and security situation in the country. The announcement came on the second anniversary of the military coup, which the anti-junta resistance marked by calling a "silent strike" and requesting the public to stay home to communicate its opposition to the coup government. The vistas of empty tarmac that appeared on social media testified to the broad popular opposition to the armed forces and the difficulties that it faces in convening an election designed to launder and legitimize military rule. "Although according to the Section 425 of the constitution, a state of emergency can only be granted two times, the current situation is under unusual circumstances and it is suitable to extend it one more time of six months," Myint Swe said at the meeting.

A statement issued after Tuesday's NSDC meeting blamed anti-military resistance groups for "committing killings of innocent people, blowing up public places, imposing armed intimidation and coercion on the people." Senior security officials were more explicit about the challenges during a recent "counter-terrorism" meeting, the minutes of which were leaked and published by exiled media outlets. At the meeting, senior officials noted that the regime was failing to secure public support for its attempt to defeat the shadow National Unity Government (NUG) and that the People's Defence Forces (PDFs), which are loosely aligned with the NUG, had expanded beyond the junta's control. None of the officials present at the meeting was confident the regime would be able to successfully hold an election by August. This was something that Min Aung Hlaing appeared to acknowledge at yesterday's NDSC meeting, which was paraphrased as saying, "Only when peace and stability prevail all over the country and there is a situation where everything is normal, will it be possible for general elections to be held in all parts of the country."

ADDITIONAL

The military backed State Administration Council (SAC), consequent to the coup when it seized power in February 2021 had initially said that it would hold power for one year, after which it would convene elections. However, this is the third six month extension that the junta has announced since seizing power in February 2021.

COMMENTS



Source: NDTV

The military takeover in Myanmar has met with consistent resistance from the Myanmar's population during the past two years. It has also inflamed pre-existing ethnic conflicts around the country's periphery, complicating any effort to stage an electoral transition to a less direct form of military rule. The extension of emergency by another six months possibly indicates an acknowledgment that it is not possible to convene an election in Myanmar in the current political and economic state. The military's control over large parts of the country is also contested, which leave relatively lesser areas in which it could guarantee secure polling. There is a question mark over any appreciable difference to the feasibility of the junta's election plans by extending the emergency by another six months. India maintains its support to the ASEAN's five point consensus on Myanmar and would like to see Myanmar move towards a democratic government. However, ASEAN's continued work on the Myanmar crisis to facilitate a resolution by implementing this peace plan aimed at stopping the bloodshed in the country does not appear to be making any head way presently.

India's LCA Navy and MIG-29K Trap Aboard New Aircraft Carrier Vikrant

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2023/02/indias-lca-navy-and-mig-29k-trap-aboard-new-aircraft-carrier-vikrant>

INS Vikrant is the first indigenous Aircraft Carrier and the most complex warship ever built by our country. It is a matter of pride that the ship has been designed in-house by Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau and constructed by M/s Cochin Shipyard Limited. The ship had sailed for maiden Sea Trials on 04 Aug 21. Since then, she has undergone sea sorties for trials of Main Propulsion, Power Generation equipment, Fire Fighting systems, Aviation Facility Complex equipment etc. The Carrier was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 02 Sep 22, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi was the Chief Guest. The construction of the Carrier is a big boost to the 'AatmaNirbhar Bharat' vision of the Government of India. The Carrier has been undertaking extensive Air Operations with Rotary Wing and Fixed Wing aircraft since 13 Dec 22 towards Air Certification and Flight Integration Trials for achieving the ultimate aim of being 'Combat Ready'. As part of the aviation trials, landing of LCA (Navy) and MiG-29K onboard INS Vikrant was carried out on 06 Feb 23 by Indian Naval Test Pilots.

COMMENTS

The landing of an indigenously built fighter aircraft on an indigenously built Aircraft Carrier speaks of the focused vision and growth of the Indian defence industry. A big leap towards self reliance and a major step towards bringing together technologies which was earlier a capability with few select nations. The landing of LCA(Navy) on deck has demonstrated AatmaNirbharta in India's capability to design, develop, construct and operate indigenous Aircraft Carrier with indigenous Fighter Aircraft.



Source: Naval News

It is a landmark achievement being the first time that trials of a prototype aircraft – indigenously designed & produced by Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) & Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), has been successfully undertaken on an indigenous Aircraft Carrier. Further, the landing of MiG-29K onboard INS Vikrant is also a significant achievement as it marks the successful integration of the aircraft with the indigenous carrier as well as further enhances the Combat Readiness of the Indian Navy. Availability of two different fighter aircraft for operations from a single deck will have far reaching impact on the missions undertaken by the Indian Navy. It will provide flexibility in planning and executing missions/ operations in the future.

Nimitz Strike Group, Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group Drill in South China Sea

<https://news.usni.org/2023/02/13/nimitz-strike-group-makin-island-amphibious-ready-group-drill-in-south-china-sea>

A United States Navy carrier strike group and amphibious ready group are drilling in the South China Sea in the service's latest effort to test how the formations can operate together with their respective platforms. The Nimitz CSG and the Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group ARG started performing "integrated Expeditionary Strike Force (ESF) operations" on Saturday, according to a U.S. Navy news release. The Navy did not disclose how long the two groups would operate together. The 13th MEU, combined with the amphibious capabilities of the ARG, enables the NIMCSG to employ the versatile capabilities of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force. This seamless naval integration established a powerful presence in the region, which supports peace and stability," the release reads. The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit is embarked on the Makin Island ARG. Official social media pages of the Nimitz CSG, Makin Island ARG and the 13th MEU hinted at the joint exercise last week by continuously posting infographics of their composition throughout the week and tagging each other in the posts.

COMMENTS

The ESF operation is part of the Noble Fusion campaign of learning and experimentation for Seventh Fleet, III Marine Expeditionary Force, and the greater Navy and Marine Corps team. Task Force 76/3 is an experimental organization formed from the merging of Task Force 76 and 3d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, to support Naval integration and staff operations. Even before Noble Fusion began, the US Navy has been experimenting with how amphibious assault ships with embarked F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters can integrate with carriers.



Source: Real Clear Defence

Meanwhile there has been an occasion that a China Coast Guard ship directed a military-grade laser light at Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) patrol vessel BRP Malapascua (MRRV-4403) on 06 Feb 23. Malapascua was supporting a rotation and resupply mission for the Philippine Navy (PN) in Ayungin Shoal which is in the West Philippine Sea. Ayungin Shoal, known internationally as Second Thomas Shoal, is where the Philippine Navy deliberately grounded landing ship tank BRP Sierra Madre (LT-57) to stake its claim to the shoal and to serve as an outpost there that is manned by a garrison of a dozen Philippine Marines. In February 2022, in the similar circumstances Australia had accused a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warship of illuminating a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) P-8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) with a laser while PLAN ships were sailing in Australia's northern Economic Exclusion Zone and the RAAF P-8 monitored them. China has been denying these accusations and continuing to illuminate ships and aircraft in the South China Sea.

Starlink Limits Ukraine's Maritime Drones at Time of New Russian Threat

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2023/02/starlink-limits-ukraines-maritime-drones-at-time-of-new-russian-threat/>

As the saying goes, Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. The Russian military has copied Ukraine's now famous 'Maritime Drone' and begun using it against Ukrainian targets. At the same time, Ukraine's own ability to deploy maritime drones looks to have been massively reduced. SpaceX has said that it will prevent Ukraine using its Starlink system for its drones. The Black Sea appears to be becoming more Russian friendly again. On Feb 10 a small Maritime Drone (USV – uncrewed surface vessel) passed through the humanitarian grain corridor to Odesa and rammed a bridge. The large explosion undoubtedly caused some damage to Zatoka bridge, although assessments are unclear at this point. The bridge, which crosses the estuary of the Dniester River, is an important road and rail link in southern Ukraine. It has been targeted before by Russian missiles but this latest attack ushers in a new phase. The bridge is easily reachable from the Black Sea, which presented Russia with a new opportunity: Explosive laden drone boats. The exact details of the Russian drone boat are subject to speculation. Neither side has shared specific details.

COMMENTS

The announcement that SpaceX, a company founded by Elon Musk, will limit how Ukraine can use its Starlink satellite service is bad news for the Ukrainians' Military. The impact on frontline use of Starlink is only slowly emerging, but it is clear that drone usage will be affected. Ukraine's innovative Maritime Drones have been used to attack the Russian Navy in Sevastopol and on November 18 2022 one even reached Novorossiysk. These attacks did not sink any Russian warships but they did contribute to keeping the Russian Navy at bay. New harbour defenses were implemented by the Russian Navy and many fewer Russian ships ventured out. The Maritime Drones were able to operate so effectively because of the use of Starlink, providing low-latency and high-resolution data connections which appear hard to the Russians to jam. Therefore the drones could be equipped with multi-channel optical devices. This gave their pilots, hundreds of miles away, comparatively excellent situational awareness. So the loss of Starlink will likely to be a limiter on Ukraine's Maritime Drone operations. It is unlikely that Ukraine will give up, but compromises and reengineering will have to take place, the reengineered ones are likely to be less versatile. Consequently there may be a new phase in the Black Sea operations with bolder operations by Russia. On February 13 one or more Russian Improved-KILO Class submarines made a surface transit from Novorossiysk to Sevastopol, by implication to load with Kalibr cruise missiles for a future attack. This transit was risky, but with the threat of Ukrainian Maritime Drones diminished, the Russian Navy could have found it comparatively less risky.

Japan Urges India To Join Indo-Pacific Economic Framework's Trade Pillar

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/japan-urges-india-to-join-indo-pacific-economic-frameworks-trade-pillar/articleshow/97857957.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/opting-out-of-ipef-trade-pillar-was-necessary/article65938850.ece>

Japan is encouraging India to join the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) Trade Pillar that also includes the digital economy. PM Narendra Modi has been a strong votary of the digital economy.

COMMENTS

“Any unilateral or multilateral initiative spearheaded by one of the superpowers, such as the US or China, will unquestionably serve their interests more than those of the other member nations. Be it QUAD or BRICS, India has been a member to both the initiatives but when compared to the two superpowers, India's involvement and interests in such unilateral entities are quite small. Economic factor plays a crucial role in this. A country's ability to set its national interests through such institutions or initiatives increases with increasing economic contribution. The US established the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF) which puts US agenda and interests in the forefront.

IPEF is instrumental in advancing the objectives of American industries. This will strengthen the US economic leadership in the region which will offer more jobs to the American workers and promote American businesses. Addressing the inflation issues have been a major priority of the US and IPEF has the ability to lower costs by making the supply chain resilience more efficient.

However, the question arises whether IPEF benefits India or not. Most of the policies launched by IPEF doesn't sync well with that of India's trade policies. The White House released a fact sheet on the IPEF which elaborately discussed on high-standard rules of the road in the digital economy, including standards on cross-border data flows and data localisation. IPEF also promotes a strong labor and environment standards and corporate accountability provisions that encourages a race to the top for workers through trade.



Source: US Embassy and Consulates in India

Meanwhile, India has always insisted that labour and environmental standards should be dealt by their own merits at specific forums, such as the ILO, and not at platforms debating trade issues, whereas cross-border data flow and data localisation are matters that India is still discussing at the domestic level before firming up regulations in the area.

Given the situation, Commerce & Industry Minister Piyush Goyal's announcement earlier this month to opt out of the trade pillar for now seemed logical.

Despite all the skepticism India has, Japan has been immensely encouraging India to join the IPEF Trade pillar. Japan brings a common element to India's interest in joining the initiative and i.e., India's strong adherence to become a digital economy. Since, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already announced to launch "Digital Public Infrastructure Task Force" at G20 and IPEF Trade Pillar has digital economy as one of its key pillars, the Japanese negotiator in IPEF Yamashita Takanari believes that both Japan and India can use the IPEF Trade Pillar as a platform of outreach. Since India is holding the G20 Presidency of 2023, India along with Japan has the ability to act as a bridge between the Global South, G7 countries and the IPEF countries. India's position to hold two presidencies i.e., G20 and SCO in the same year enables India to hold a significant position which Japan definitely looks up to especially in terms of outreach.

Apart from the economic factor, India joining the IPEF Trade Pillar makes sense from a strategic standpoint. IPEF can also be seen as an American tool to reduce Chinese influence in the region which suits India as well. But that shouldn't make India put its economic interests in the back seat.

In the above backdrop, India has not put itself out of the Trade Pillar permanently but only for the time being. When Indian trade policies sync in well, India would definitely look up to being a part of it.

After Japan and Netherlands, the US Goes After South Korea To Block Their Chip Trade With China

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/us-working-to-get-south-korea-to-block-chip-trade-with-china-impose-sanctions-12099382.html>

Traditionally, South Korea has a strong trade relationship with China, especially when it comes to technology and semiconductors. However, the US now wants South Korea to impose sanctions on China on silicon chips, and join Japan, Taiwan and Netherlands as a united front.

South Korea and China have a very solid trade relationship around semiconductors. The robust semiconductor trade flows between China and South Korea, however, are now under pressure as Washington strives to exclude Beijing from global technology supply networks. With that being said, analysts say the US stance would hurt Korea's chip titans.

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South Korea is at crossroads because of the US's ambitions to control and contain the Chinese semiconductor industry through the proposed Chip 4 Alliance. The alliance, although not completely actualized had a fallout on South Korean semiconductor giants having their bases in China. Washington's restrictions on certain Chinese chip manufacturers created a ripple effect of supply chain distribution for Korean chip-making companies such as Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix. China-South Korea relations have always been epitomized by the trade that had kept their diplomatic ties floating. At the same time, Seoul is privy to its military ties with the US.

The restrictions by Washington have not been supported by South Korean local companies that are now caught between a geopolitical spat and an increasing deficit between Seoul and Beijing. The trade for semiconductors between the two countries accounts for 60% of the latter's exports and this may not benefit the Yoon Seok Yeol administration to completely side with the US through the Chip 4 alliance. These limitations have also brought to light a long-term issue that the South Korean government must address is how to handle the importation of raw materials from China if the limitations continue.

The Chip 4 alliance is highly ambitious in its pursuit of wiping out China entirely from the semiconductor and chips market. But one has to closely look at the partners of the alliance. There is no doubt about the technology and edge these countries possess, especially Taiwan and South Korea. But address the elephant in the room, who will be the alternative to China's supply of raw materials in manufacturing these semiconductors and chips, yet remains unaddressed.

The counterbalance by China in becoming self-sufficient in this industry had proved fatal for the Korean companies to deteriorate further.

The local companies having their bases in China are dealing with twofold problems: First, to look for an alternative supplier and second, to deal with the Chinese industrial and corporate espionage problem.

The geopolitics of East Asia is severely complicated, yet intertwined. South Korea cannot afford to lose its Chinese markets because of the availability of cheap raw materials and labour, a price that none of the members, including the United States cannot compensate through government-funded research and subsidies. The US has already targeted Taiwan, South Korea and even India as alternative markets for its semiconductor supply chain, but the scenario appears bleak for South Korea to find alternative markets other than the already existing market in China. Moreover, South Korea and Japan are known to share an exclusive trade relationship since 2018 and a never-ending colonial issue that supersedes the current deficit in the latter's semiconductor market.

Trade deficit between China and South Korea is nearing the threshold and is expected to peak in this year, if the current market trends continue to prevail. For South Korea to come out of this crossfire, it is about to realize and assess the potential harm that these policies can do its traditional market with China and must not weigh this with the US-ROK military alliance.

North Korea Parades Largest Long-Range Missile Array

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64577925>

North Korea has shown its largest display ever of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), a number analysts say could potentially challenge the US' defence system. About a dozen long-range ICBMs were shown at Wednesday's military parade. Leader Kim Jong-un was seen at the midnight parade with his young daughter elevated to his side. Kim Ju-ae's appearance has fuelled speculation she's being positioned as the successor.



Source: BBC

COMMENTS

North Korea celebrated the 75th Founding Anniversary of its Army (조선 인민군 창건 75 돌경축 열병식) and has yet again proven the country's military might through the revolutionary transformations that had transcended economic sanctions. The successful test of Hwasong-17 in 2022, had elevated North Korea's military dominance vis a vis nuclear development. However, North Korea, in this military parade showcased 11 more such ICBMs that are far more than the numbers estimated by the US Defence System.

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Furthermore, the images released by North Korean State Media Agency, KCNA, indicated that the prototypes of these missiles are extremely similar to 'solid-fuel' ICBMs. If the analysis provided is true, North Korea will have an edge over testing its missiles, as solid-fuel ICBMs are difficult to track and locate and are less time-consuming. Kim Jong Un's regime, for a long time, has tried to create and develop 'solid-fuel' ICBMs that would enable the country to be at par with major defence-equipped countries like the US, Russia, and China. The display of a 'solid-fuel' ICBM is the Supreme Leader's way of 'cementing' North Korea's repute as a 'nuclear-armed country'. Likewise, ***if the speculations of solid-fuel ICBMs hold to be true, North Korea would have completed its defence modernization; a vision that would prove Kim Jong Un to be truly 'Supreme'.***



Source: Al Jazeera

The development of nuclear weapons for North Korea, at this stage has become less of deterrence and more of provocation and bargain. The pattern of tests that were recorded has only been in lieu of the growing alliance and exercise of military power between the US and South Korea. The military parade took place only days after the joint drill between the US and South Korea concluded. The pattern of provocation continues to alarm the West in its failed attempts at comprehending Kim's bargains for North Korea's nuclear development.

The policies pursued by the West for North Korea's disarmament and denuclearization have to be revisited and re-evaluated.

As far as India is concerned, it continues to monitor the situation whilst maintaining a relation of cordial friendship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. No statements have been recorded from New Delhi with respect to the military parade.

Sideling the military part, leadership in North Korea is intrinsic to the policies formulated and implemented for the country. ***The country's obsession with Nuclear Missiles started under Kim Jong Un and therefore, the next succession is likely going to be a major geopolitical turnabout.*** The successor may also decide the trajectory for North Korea's defence goals and objectives. Consequently, the presence of his daughter, Kim Ju Ae, led to speculations of succession, as it is believed that only 'respected' and 'ranked' people are permitted to appear for such events of national importance.

As North Korea endures a painful and incessant number of sanctions and economic adversities, the military parade amplified Kim's vision and priorities for North Korea to become a fully functional nuclear state.