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Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

FDD: <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/04/21/war-in-ukraine-update-zelensky-visits-frontline-city-putin-in-ukraine>.

2.Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-stages-raids-across-dnipro-river-counteroffensive-looms-2023-04-25/>

3. CNN <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/29/europe/russia-ukraine-spring-offensive-intl/index.html> &

4. Newsweek: <https://www.newsweek.com/ukraine-knocks-out-power-attack-russia-report-1797520> & <https://www.newsweek.com/howitzers-arrive-ukraine-russia-attack-1797342>

5.Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/UKRAINE-CRISIS/COUNTEROFFENSIVE/mopakddwbpa/index.html?s=08>

RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE

On April 17, 2023, President Vladimir Putin headed to the "Dnieper" Group of Forces headquarters in the Kherson region of southern Ukraine and the Luhansk region to learn more about the current activities. Russian cruise missiles and drones attacked the cities of Kyiv, Uman, and Dnipro on April 28 2023, and Pavlohrad a railway hub on April 30, 2023 . In order to impede Ukrainian advances, Russia has erected large fortifications that span from the Russian city of Voronok across eastern Ukraine and southwest to the Crimean Peninsula. This construction took place as the Ukrainian military took a break to reorganise towards the end of 2022. Currently, Russian forces are still engaged in street-by-street combat in Bakhmut, an eastern Ukrainian city. Having apparently consolidated control over a railway station near the city's centre, Russian troops are slowly pushing deeper into the part of western Bakhmut which is still controlled by Ukraine.

COMMENTS

This is the second trip of President Putin to occupied territory since Moscow launched the operations, ostensibly to boost the morale of the troops before the onset of the spring counter-offensive by Ukraine. Planning of complex ground operations will reveal how the battle will unfold and who wins the spring offensive. Everything depends upon where Ukraine chooses to focus on the area of offensive and how well-prepared Russia is in those areas of offensive. Weather will be conducive to undertake the operations.



Source: *The New York Times*

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

EQUIPMENT INDUCTION (RUSSIAN SIDE)

(i) The Russian military has begun deploying T-14 Armata tanks in the ongoing “special military operation” in Ukraine, which are old but are said to have been fitted with enhanced anti-tank ammunition protection.

(ii) Iran has provided Russia with more than 300,000 artillery shells.

COMMENTS

Russia is engaged in its preparation by equipping itself for the spring offensive.

UKRAINIAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE AND PEACE TALKS

Ukraine is nearly finished with its preparations for a springtime counteroffensive. On April 29, 2023, President Zelensky declared that his nation will still launch its intended counteroffensive despite the absence of F-16 fighters. It will be a turning point in the conflict when it is launched. In an effort to expel Russian troops, Ukrainian forces stationed on the western bank of the River Dnipro routinely launch raids on the eastern bank close to the city of Kherson. So far, Ukrainian Artillery has shelled several Russian villages in the Russian region of Belgorod situated close to the northeast of the Ukrainian region of Kharkhiv. A massive fire erupted at an oil reservoir in Crimea after it was hit by two Ukrainian drones. Tamila Tasheva, Ukrainian President Zelensky's representative for the Black Sea peninsula said on April 25, 2023 that Ukrainian have plans to regain Crimea from the Russian occupation. Finally, on the talks to end the conflict, Chinese President Mr Xi and Ukrainian President Mr Zelensky spoke by phone on April 26th, their first exchange since the Russian invasion.

COMMENTS

Breaking through will be extremely difficult because the Russians had over six months to prepare the area and construct a complex system of defence. Although fortifications, if constructed and used effectively, could make a major breakthrough difficult, the West has provided Ukrainians with artillery and armour.

EQUIPMENT INDUCTION (UKRAINIAN SIDE)

(i) Ukraine announced it had received its first Patriots, the West's most advanced missile- and air-defence system, from America, Germany and the Netherlands.

(ii) Ukraine has recently received French made 155mm Caesar self-propelled howitzers from Denmark and is deployed.

(iii) On Apr 28, 2023, NATO Secretary General announced that they have supplied 1,550 armoured vehicles, 230 tanks and large number of ammunition.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

- (iv) Israel plans to test an early warning system in Kyiv next month that would alert Ukrainians of incoming Russian missiles.
- (v) So far, eight MiG-29 fighters have been provided by Poland and Germany has approved the transfer of five German MiG-29's.
- (vi) The US is installing a network of sensors across Ukraine to detect a possible nuclear explosion and bursts of radiation. The move would deny Russia any opportunity to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine without attribution.



Source: Vox

COMMENTS

Though the large number of weapons stores has been delivered and the training to operate the weapons has been imparted, the Ukrainian offensive will be keenly watched especially the combined arms warfare. US and NATO diplomatic efforts are now critical in helping Ukraine with moral and material support.

Bangladesh Announces its Indo Pacific Outlook

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/12x7qfe9xn>

- Dhaka on Monday announced an “Indo-Pacific” outlook that emphasised a free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive Indo-Pacific for the shared prosperity for all, ending the curiosity of a number of countries on its position over the growing geo-politics in the Indo-Pacific region. The 15 point outlook emphasised security as a pre-requisite for economic prosperity and clarified that Dhaka leaning towards no side in the growing geo-political competition between China and the United States centering the region.
- State minister for foreign affairs Md Shahriar Alam unveiled the final outlook in presence of foreign minister AK Abdul Momen at a press conference at the foreign ministry in Dhaka. Shahriar Alam said that “Being a littoral State of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh considers the stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific to be a crucial factor in realizing her ‘Vision 2041’, ie, building a modern, knowledge based developed country by 2041. The Indo-Pacific area’s collective share in global GDP, preponderance in international trade, enhanced climate action and growing technological dynamism can be key determinants for ensuring Bangladesh’s long term resilience and prosperity. Bangladesh, therefore, envisions a free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive Indo-Pacific for the shared prosperity for all.” Shahriar Alam further said Bangladesh followed four guiding principles to finalise the outlook, the first one being the foreign policy dictum of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - ‘Friendship towards all, malice towards none’. The second principle reads, “constitutional mandate on the conduct of international relations based on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and equality, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful settlement of international disputes, as well as respect for international laws and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter and striving for renunciation of the use of force in international relations and for general and complete disarmament.” The third principle is an adherence to the relevant UN treaties and international conventions, as applicable, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the fourth one is constructive regional and international cooperation for sustainable development, international peace and security, humanitarian action, fundamental rights and freedoms.
- Consistent with these four principles, the objective that will guide Bangladesh’s Indo-Pacific outlook and engagements includes “strengthen mutual trust and respect, forge partnerships and cooperation and promote dialogue and understanding with the aim of ensuring peace, prosperity, security and stability for all in the Indo-Pacific.” It also aims to “strengthen existing mechanisms on maritime safety and security in the Indo-Pacific, including response to emergencies at sea and conduct of search and rescue and uphold the exercise of freedom of navigation and over-flight, in accordance with international law and relevant international conventions, including UNCLOS, 1982.”

- The outlook aims to “maintain meaningful and value driven contribution to international non proliferation, peacekeeping, peace building and counter terrorism efforts, including with partners in the Indo Pacific and support regional and international efforts towards combating trans-national organised crimes in the Indo-Pacific through both normative and practical actions.” It targets to “expand global lead on the flagship agenda of a ‘culture of peace’, enhance focus on the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda, promote inter faith harmony and work towards building peaceful, just and inclusive societies in the Indo-Pacific.” It will “promote open, transparent, rules based multilateral systems that enable equitable and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific and beyond through inclusive economic growth, right to development and shared prosperity for all.”
- The outlook will “enhance physical, institutional, energy, digital and human connectivity, facilitate movement of goods, services, capital and people in a systematic manner, and promote technology transfer, access to innovations and responsible behavior in open and secure cyber space and outer space.” It targets to “leverage the domestic agriculture, manufacturing and services sectors towards building resilient regional and global value chains to better manage future crisis and disruptions and to promote unimpeded and free flow of commerce in the Indo-Pacific” and “promote conservation, sustainable use and management of oceans, seas, and marine resources in the Indo-Pacific.”
- Bangladesh also wants to “engage proactively in promoting food security, water solidarity and disaster risk reduction in the Indo-Pacific, including through disseminating home-grown good practices,” and “continue tangible work towards addressing the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, marine pollution and other significant and harmful impacts on the environment in line with relevant international conventions and commitments.”
- Dhaka also aims to “foster cooperation among Indo-Pacific countries to ensure energy security for all, including through investment and technology transfer on renewable energy,” and “work towards developing coordinated response to future pandemics and ensuring health security, including through access for all to global public goods like vaccines, diagnostics and other treatments.”
- The 15 point outlook includes “collaboration with sub regional partners and relevant organisations towards bolstering regional cooperation and enhancing mutually beneficial complementarities,” as well as to “strengthen collaboration and cooperation in science, technology, research and innovation for shared benefits of all, in keeping with the vision of ‘Smart Bangladesh’”

COMMENTS

The US had announced its Indo-Pacific Strategy centering the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean in 2017. Japan, India and Australia joined this US strategic initiative. China sees the US Indo-Pacific Strategy as a move to counter its progress. US had been attempting to involve Bangladesh in its Indo-Pacific strategy since 2018.

However, Bangladesh announcing its “Indo-Pacific Outlook” a day before its Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s visit to Japan clarifies its position on the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. Japan had earlier this month proposed developing an industrial hub in Bangladesh with supply chains to the landlocked North Eastern states of India and to Nepal and Bhutan by developing a port and transport in the region. Therefore, this move by Bangladesh may help in its economic prosperity and growth.



Source: Prothom Alo English

Pakistan: Insurgents Destroy Several Chinese Mobile Towers Along CPEC Route In Balochistan

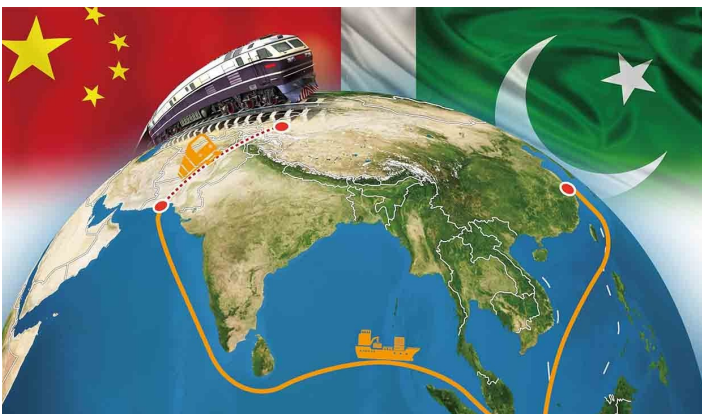
<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/pakistan-insurgents-destroy-several-chinese-mobile-towers-along-cpec-route-in-balochistan>

Six mobile phone towers owned by Pakistani and Chinese firms were allegedly set ablaze by the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLA) in Dasht tehsil of Kech district in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. The BLA also attacked mobile towers of the Chinese business “Zong” and the Pakistani company “Ufone”. Similar attacks occurred on a second Ufone tower along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route in Dasht, Kech, and on the Zong Company towers in Sungai Bazaar, Kech, where all the machinery was destroyed.

Economic Partnership Between Pakistan And China Stalled: Report

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/economic-partnership-between-pakistan-and-china-stalled-report>

The imposition of fines and stalling of various projects have increased economic mistrust between Pakistan and China. A Pakistan civil court had imposed a USD 2.48 million fine on China National Petroleum Corporation after it was alleged of violating the contract signed with Petroleum Exploration (Pvt) Ltd. The fine was imposed after various projects under the CPEC, like the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) and Main Line1 (ML-I) - the railway line between Karachi and Peshawar were stalled and now have turned into financial liabilities.



Source: YouTube

COMMENTS

Last year, over 30 Chinese companies involved in energy, communication, and railways, had threatened to shut down their operations unless payments were made. Moreover, Chinese projects and financing have stroked public protests. Police in Gwadar recently imposed emergency measures and dismantled a protest camp that had obstructed operations at the port. China and Pakistan communicate classified information about Baloch freedom fighters through these telecom businesses, aiding the Pakistan army in escalating its ongoing military aggression and kidnappings of Baloch youngsters in Balochistan.

REGIONAL SCAN: PAKISTAN

Several Baloch groups have claimed that the Pakistan administration is deceiving the locals in order to prolong its occupancy of the territory and plunder the people and their resources by promoting the CPEC projects as being essential to the development of the Baloch people and Balochistan.

The opaque nature of the projects under the BRI, limiting scrutiny, gives Chinese companies a platform to flout rules and regulations in vulnerable countries. Contractors have inflated costs, leading to canceled projects and political backlash. In December 2021, the ADB blacklisted China CMC Engineering operating in Nepal for violating integrity rules. China Harbour Engineering was publicly accused by Bangladeshi Government Ministers of offering bribes to Bangladeshi officials in connection with a construction project.

The people of Pakistan feel that it will not help the local economy as Chinese companies and employees are handed over China-funded projects with high-interest loans. Chinese companies and workers are notorious for frequently transgressing the labor standards of the countries in which they operate. A lack of due diligence, corruption, and a disregard for indigenous rights and the environment have characterized Chinese projects abroad. As the Pakistani economy is heading towards an economic catastrophe, China's free hand in meddling in its economic matters would further deepen mistrust among ordinary Pakistanis. We will keep monitoring the future implications.

Army Chief General Asim Munir In China To Strengthen Military Ties

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/483660-army-chief-gen-asim-munir-in-china-to-strengthen-military-ties>

This is Gen Munir's fourth overseas visit ever since he took command of Pakistan Army. In January, Gen Munir paid an official visit to Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE), in his maiden overseas visit as the army chief. A month later, Gen Munir visited the United Kingdom on a highly important visit on Britain's Ministry of Defence invitation to discuss security-related strategic issues. It is common for the new Army chief in Pakistan to undertake a visit to China within weeks of his appointment. The delay this time is attributed to the internal situation in Pakistan.



Source: Pakistan Daily

China, Pakistan Underline 'Strong Defence Cooperation' For Regional Peace

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/484253-coas-wang-yi-underline-china-pakistans-strong-defense-cooperation-for-regional-peace>

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir and China's State Councilor Wang Yi jointly emphasized that a tight military collaboration between the two neighboring nations was vital to ensure regional calm. The two sides reaffirmed China-Pakistan's all-weather strategic partnership and underlined the importance of their strong defense cooperation for peace and stability in the region. The army chief met the commander of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) at the PLA Headquarters and reiterated the need for maintaining peace and stability in the region.

COMMENTS

The visit comes amidst mounting pressure from the IMF on cash-strapped Pakistan to arrange at least \$6 billion to bridge the external payment financial gap. So far, Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. have committed to providing \$3 billion to Pakistan but the international lender has demanded assurance for the remaining amount. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif last week acknowledged the Army chief's efforts towards securing financial commitments from Pakistan's friendly countries.

Pakistan has supported China on its core issues, including the "One China" policy, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea and the Chinese had a principled position on Kashmir and Pakistan's national development, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Deep-rooted historical relations between the two countries, Chinese support for Pakistan underscored the need to further deepen the existing ties in the economy, trade, and financial sectors.

The ties between China and Pakistan are facing growing strain due to problems facing the ambitious CPEC project and a religiously motivated attack on a Chinese engineer accused of blasphemy against Islam. China has expressed repeated concerns over the security of Chinese nationals in Pakistan in the past. The economic crisis has worsened due to the prevailing political chaos in the country. Fighting between the coalition government and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf of ousted premier Imran Khan on the one hand and the government and judiciary on the other hand over the holding of elections in Punjab have exacerbated the financial crisis in Pakistan.

Pakistan Lacks Ammunition, Economic Strength, Cannot Afford War With India: Ex-Army Chief Gen Bajwa to Journalists

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/pakistan-lacks-ammunition-economic-strength-cannot-afford-war-with-india-ex-army-chief-gen-bajwa-to-journalists>

Pakistan's former Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa had reportedly told two senior journalists that Pakistan lacked the ammunition and economic strength to fight against India. Gen Bajwa admitted that Pakistan "cannot go to war with India".

Tanks are not in condition to work, there is no diesel for the movements of cannons. Gen Bajwa had in 2021 revealed that he held secret talks with India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and how Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit was planned to Pakistan soon after a ceasefire was announced between the two countries in 2021.

'Ready To Take 'Battle to India's Territory' Pakistan Threatens India As Hamid Mir Reveals Gen Bajwa's Confession

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/ready-to-take-battle-to-india-s-territory-pakistan-threatens-india-as-hamid-mir-reveals-gen-bajwa-s-confession>

Pakistan upped the ante against India after two senior journalists Hamid Mir and Naseem Zehra spilt the beans claiming that Islamabad lacked the ammunition and economic strength to fight against India. DG ISPR Maj General Ahmed Sharif negated the claims about the Pak army's 'operational preparedness', threatening to take the 'battle to India's territory' if the situation arises.

COMMENTS

40 CRPF personnel were killed in the terrorist attack on a convoy of security vehicles in J&K's Pulwama on 14 Feb 2019 and on 26 Feb 2019, IAF launched an attack on JeM training camps in PoK using precision-guided munitions. The daring, resolute & response mechanism by IAF was not anticipated by Pakistan.

India has clearly stated that Pakistan needs to take tangible action against the terror infrastructure operating from its soil for an upward trajectory in bilateral relations.

COAS Asim Munir Vows To 'Further Solidify' Bond Between Army and People

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/484461-nothing-is-more-sacred-to-us-than-safety-security-of-people-coas-asim-munir>

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir reiterated the military's commitment to Pakistan's stability and vowed to ensure that the bond between the army and the people is preserved and further solidified. The people of Pakistan are central to the unity of the state and added that the first and foremost is loyalty to the state of Pakistan and commitment to the Constitutional role assigned to armed forces of Pakistan. Regarding the Kashmir issue he said "We will continue to provide political, moral and diplomatic support to our Kashmiri brothers." COAS said the armed forces of Pakistan stand firm with their strong will and determination while fulfilling the promises of Almighty Allah as true followers.

COMMENTS

Pakistan claims that various social welfare programs have been announced after slashing the army's budget. The Navy and Airforce have also participated in relief activities. The army has reviewed its expenditures in view of the country's economic situation. Petroleum, ration and non-operational movement are being reduced. Pakistan claims that socio-economic uplift measures that include 3,654 projects are being completed at a cost of Rs162 billion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and 14,000 people have been given jobs in Pakistan Army and the Frontier Corps. However, the fact remains that KP faces 81 billion shortfall in rehabilitation of flood affected people and the federal government owes Rs 139 billion in arrears of the province.

Pakistan's civil and military agencies took great steps against terrorists. Pakistan must remember that terrorist organizations and their facilitators' have no ideology, religion, or faith. They attack mosques, police, religious scholars, media persons, and citizens. There should not be space for spoilers of their peace. Bilateral relations are likely going to stay the same in 2023 and may further get complicated because of the upcoming domestic political events in both countries such as the 2023 general elections in Pakistan. Terrorism will continue to remain the issue of contention. We will keep monitoring the future implications.

Pakistan's "Acquisition" Of Cutting-Edge Turkish Bayraktar Akinci Drones Raises Red Flag In India

<https://eurasianimes.com/pakistans-acquisition-of-turkish-akinci-drones-raises-red-flag/>

Pakistan buying the first batch of Bayraktar Akinci combat drones from Turkey has raised a red flag in the Indian intelligence system. Pakistan is acquiring these costly drones when the country is facing the worst economic crisis. "It is strange that on the one hand, Pakistan is begging before the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans to restore its economy but on the other hand making a major deal with Turkey for Akinci drones," Sood told EurAsian Times.

COMMENTS

Bayraktar Akinci is a high-altitude long-endurance drone that can be armed with ammunition. Akinci is the Turkish word for 'raider.' The drone can fire various missiles, both air-to-air and air-to-ground. The Turkish combat drone is a strategic class platform that can carry various payloads. The Akinci is capable of conducting operations that are performed with fighter jets. Bayraktar Akinci is equipped with dual artificial intelligence avionics which supports signal processing, sensor fusion, and situational awareness in real-time. It carries electronic support systems, dual satellite communication systems, air-to-air radar, collision avoidance radar, and synthetic aperture radar.

REGIONAL SCAN: PAKISTAN

Akinci is 12.2m in length and 4.1m in height and can carry a maximum weight of 6000 kilograms, including a payload of 1500 kilograms. The drone has a wingspan of 20m and can fly at a height of 40 thousand feet. Pakistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and many other nations friendly to Turkey already operate Bayraktar TB2 tactical armed drones. Azerbaijan used these TB2 drones against Armenia in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. These Turkish drones were believed to be the primary reason for the victory of Azerbaijan against Armenia. Ukraine has also operated Turkish TB2 drones in the ongoing war with Russia.



Source: Daily Sabah

Pakistan Appeals To US For Restoration Of Military Financing

<https://www.outlookindia.com/international/pakistan-appeals-us-for-restoration-of-military-financing-news-282236>

The cash starved Pakistan has appealed United States to restore military financing and sales. The financing was suspended by US to Pakistan during former President Donald Trump's tenure. Pakistan's envoy to US Masood Khan, during the seminar in Washington said: "It is important that the US restores, for Pakistan, Foreign Military Financing and Foreign Military Sales, suspended by the previous administration." Following US troops withdrawal from Afghanistan, US-Pakistan relationship has been stuck in a prolonged period of uncertainty. And, now with the rivalry between US and China, Pakistan's relations with America have strained and also damaged the country's deteriorating economy.

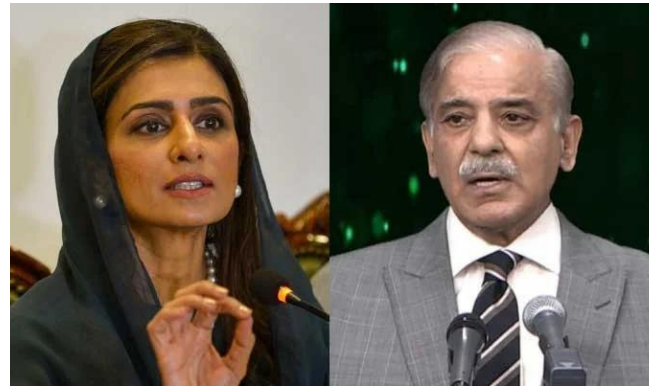
COMMENTS

Earlier, in Sep 2022, USA gave a major security assistance worth of \$450 Million to Pakistan for the sustainment programme of F-16 fleet. USA said that this will sustain Islamabad's capability to meet current and future counterterrorism threats. By allowing Pakistan to retain interoperability with the US and without altering the basic military balance in the region, US said that the proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of Washington. India has conveyed its grave concern to the US over its decision to provide military assistance to Pakistan.

REGIONAL SCAN: PAKISTAN

The conference focused on how the US-Pakistan relationship can be crafted against the backdrop of multiple challenging developments. But till now no statement has been given by the USA for military assistance to Pakistan. We will keep monitoring the future implications.

Concurrently, a discussion recently leaked secret documents from US reveal between Prime Minister and junior Foreign Minister of Pakistan (Ms Hina Rabbani Khar) and an industrial memo titled "Pakistan's Difficult Choices", parts of which were published by the Washington Post. Khar has repeatedly cautioned "that Pakistan should avoid the impression of appeasing the West" and Pakistan can longer attempt to maintain a middle ground between a regional neighbour, China and the US, as reported in Times of India on 30 April 2023 [1]



Source: GeoTV

[1]PTI, Times of India, "Pakistan PM Sharif, minister Hina Khar's discussion on US-China Tussle Leaked: Report"
URL: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistan-pm-sharif-minister-hina-khars-discussion-on-us-china-tussle-leaked-report/articleshow/99893557.cms?from=mdr>

Australia To Ramp Up Ties With India, Japan In Indo-Pacific Amid China's Aggressive Actions

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/australia-to-ramp-up-ties-with-india-japan-in-indo-pacific-amid-chinas-aggressive-actions/articleshow/99730464.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Australia on Monday said it will deepen its diplomatic and defence partnerships with key allies in the strategic Indo-Pacific, including India and Japan, in response to China's growing assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea and its threat to the global rules-based order. Unveiling the Defense Strategic Review in Canberra, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government set out a blueprint for Australia's strategic policy, defence planning and resources over the coming decades.

COMMENTS

The Solomon Islands, located in the South Pacific, were once viewed as a nation of no strategic salience. However, in more recent times, the Solomon Islands have grown significantly in the strategic competition between China, Australia, and the US. China's aspirations and interests in the Pacific Islands are the main cause for concern. Although China claims its presence in the island to be domestic in nature but the fear persists among the Australians and the Americans that China might develop strategic naval bases there. Given their strategic importance, the Solomon Islands saw some of the fiercest combat during World War II, which eventually led the Americans to fight the Japanese.

Australians and Americans believe that if China were to follow in the footsteps of Japan, Xi had the ability to blockade Taiwan in the next couple of years. On the other hand, China claims over 80 percent of the South China Sea on the basis of the nine-dash line. Despite signing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DoC) in 2002 Chinese assertiveness in the waterbody increased since 2008 and continues till date.

In addition to its strategic importance, China is expanding its economic influence in the region by making significant investments in the Southeast Asian nations. Philippines and Vietnam strongly contested China's claims in the South China Sea. However, in the recent times leaders of both Vietnam and Philippines seem to be making visits to China. In his recent visit to China, the Filipino President Marcos Junior affirmed that Philippines continues to abide by the 'One China Policy' and looks forward to deepening their friendship especially through economic cooperation.

In the above backdrop, Defence Strategic Review of Australia intends to strengthen its diplomatic and defence ties with Japan and India in order to confront China's rising assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea and its danger to the world's rules-based order. Canberra observes that Beijing's claim to sovereignty over the South China Sea "threatens the global rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific in a way that adversely impacts Australia," but not explicitly labelling Beijing as a military threat to Australia.

Further, Australia continues to make investments in strengthening the regional architecture and enhance its defence and diplomatic ties with important Indo-Pacific partners especially Japan and India.

China remained Australia's largest trading partner being the 8th largest investor in 2021. But China's tariffs and ban on Australian exports froze their relationship to a great extent and believed that Beijing was engaged in 'economic coercion'.

In response, Australia commences external approaches such as implementation of the Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework, the expansion of regional strategic multilateral, trilateral, and bilateral alliances, including the reestablishment of the Quad Partnership with Japan, India, and the United States. The Australian Prime Minister Albanese tweeted:

"We commissioned the Defence Strategic Review to make sure Australia is more secure. Today, we've released our response to the review. It shows how determined we are to keep Australians safe. Because national security is every government's most solemn responsibility." With this the Albanese has determined few key areas that require immediate attention. Improving Australia's deterrence capability is a major concern which would involve procuring nuclear-powered submarines through AUKUS. Another concern is enlarging the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) ability to precisely hit targets at extended ranges and enhance the production of weapons in Australia.



Source: *The Economic Times*

Turkey Neutralizes ISIS Leader In Syria: President Erdogan

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/turkey-neutralizes-isis-leader-in-syria-president-erdogan/articleshow/99897517.cms>

Turkey neutralized the Daesh/Islamic State terrorist organization leader Abu Hussein al-Qurashi in Syria, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Sunday (30th April, 2023), Anadolu Agency reported.

COMMENTS

This announcement comes after Erdogan's brief hiatus from public view due to sickness. North Syria, Syrian military police, and Turkish intelligence agents collaborated on the covert operation, supported by Turkey. Turkish troops have been stationed in Rojava since 2020 and occupy large areas with the assistance of Syrian allies.

This collaboration between Syria and Turkey comes after both governments met in December 2022, asserting ground deployments in Syria to reduce the terror threats in the region. ISIS suffers yet another setback with the demise of its present leader, but it is far from totally losing its power. Even though ISIS has lost a significant portion of its territory in Syria and Iraq, its international network of subsidiaries and capacity to influence young adults indicate that the risk of extremism continues.



Source: The Defence Post