



CENTRE FOR
JOINT WARFARE
STUDIES
(CENJOWS)

GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

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Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

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Ukrainian Counter Offensive

Artillery and Air Defence. Ukraine's attack on annexed Crimea on Jan05,2024 struck Russia's air defences and a command centre, with casualties in double digits, including five top commanders. Kyiv pressed its strategy of targeting the Moscow-annexed peninsula and taking the 22-month war well beyond Ukraine's borders.

Air raid sirens wailed in Sevastopol, the largest city in Crimea, and traffic was suspended for a second straight day on a bridge connecting the peninsula, which Moscow seized a decade ago. On January 06, 2024, Ukraine's military claimed that it successfully attacked the Saki military airbase in the West of the Russian-occupied Crimean peninsula.

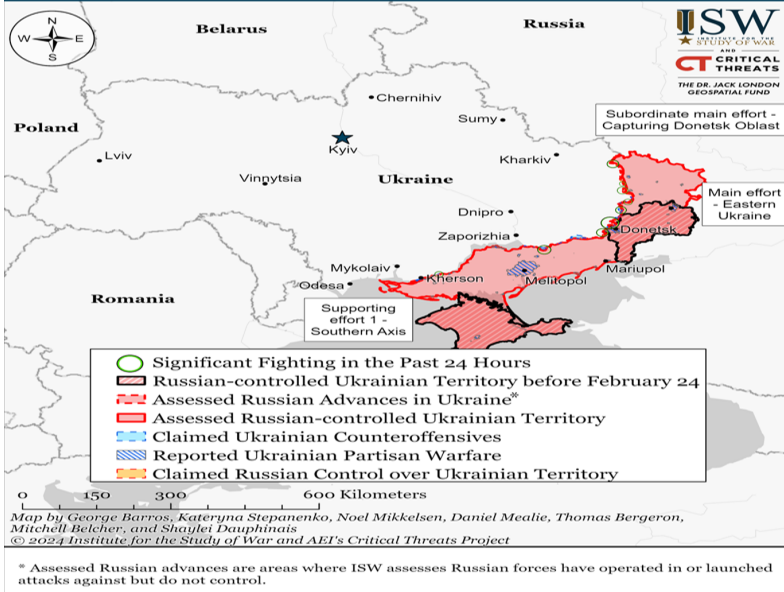
On January 08, 2024, Ukraine said its air defences had destroyed 18 out of 51 missiles, a much lower shoot-down rate than normal, which Kyiv attributed to the large number of ballistic missiles fired by Russia. Ukrainian strikes on Russia caused authorities to evacuate around 300 people from the border city of Belgorod.

Military Aid. Ukraine's foreign exchange reserves grew 42% over the past year due to unprecedented foreign financial aid, reaching 40.5 billion US Dollars as of January 01, 2024. Last year, the European Union was the most significant financial supporter and transferred \$73.5 billion in financial aid since the start of the war.

On January 12, 2024, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and British Prime Minister Rishi signed a security accord between the two countries in Kyiv till Ukraine formally joins NATO.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of January 11, 2024, 3:00 PM ET



Source: <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-11-2024>

On Jan 13, 2024, Ukraine suffered a large Russian missile attack in the early hours, mainly around the areas of the South-Eastern city of Dnipro and the northern region of Chernihiv, while its air defences were able to down a far lower proportion of them than usual. The Ukrainian Air Force Spokesperson had said earlier that Ukraine was running short of air defence missiles.

Nuclear. On January 11, 2024, a senior ally of President Vladimir Putin warned on Thursday that any Ukrainian attacks on missile launch sites inside Russia with arms supplied by the US and its allies would risk a nuclear response from Moscow. Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, now deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said that some Ukrainian military commanders were considering hitting missile launch sites inside Russia with Western-supplied long-range missiles. Kremlin critics have dismissed some of Medvedev's nuclear threats in the past as attempts to grab attention or to dissuade the West from supplying Ukraine with more weapons.

Air Defence. Russian air defences downed 36 Ukrainian drones and ten guided missiles in occupied Crimea and southern Russia on January 05, 2023, officials said. On January 06, 2024, the Russian Defence Ministry claimed that its air defence forces had shot down six anti-ship missiles over the Black Sea.

EW. Russia has been using EW aggressively to divert Ukraine's precision-guided weapons, such as Excalibur artillery rounds and HIMARS rockets. The data emerging from the battlefield indicates the growing role of drone strikes against Russian targets along the 600-mile front.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Russia has claimed to have developed a 'magic radio' for FPV (First Person View) drones that will make them highly resistant to jamming in the latest technological development for drones. The FPV drones are operated manually and do not rely on GPS satellite navigation, which reduces their vulnerability to electronic warfare tactics. Nevertheless, in the event of an enemy jamming any radio frequency the drone utilises, video transmission signals and piloting commands will be interrupted.

Air Force. On January 04, citing the RuMoD, the state news agency RIA Novosti also reported that the Russian Su-34 fighter bomber, with the help of an air bomb with a Universal Planning and Correction Module (UPMC), destroyed a Ukrainian Command and Control centre.

On January 07, 2024, Russian Su-34 fighter bombers attacked a fortified area of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the Krasnokamensk region with FAB-500 aerial bombs. By releasing bombs kitted with a glide and guidance (UMPC) kit, the stand-off range would be more significant, allowing the aircraft to stay even further from Ukrainian AD.

COMMENTS

Russia has hit Ukraine with a massive barrage of missiles and drones, continuing its strategy of targeting the country's energy infrastructure for the second winter in a row. Russia continues to advance north and south of Bakhmut, except on the east bank of the Dnieper River. Dominating the electronic spectrum to jam the adversary's drones and making drones foolproof against disruption has, thus, become crucial on the battlefield. Russia's budget for 2024 shows a 70% increase in military spending, to 6% of GDP and a third of all spending.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pledged to hit more targets on the Crimean Peninsula and inside Russian border regions this year. The goal appears to be to unsettle Russians as President Vladimir Putin seeks another six years to be in power in a March 17 election. Kyiv's energy infrastructure and telecommunication nodes have been hit for the past two months. Now, in January, military installations are being targeted.

The Ukraine Air Defence has been able to counter a large number of missile and drone attacks launched from Russia but needs more ammunition. The Ukrainians have been able to access intelligence, neutralise command and control centres and target military leaders.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict will be a long-drawn war and has reached a stalemate. Ukraine is pleading for air defence systems and ammunition. With the assistance in terms of economics and equipment being diverted to Gaza by the US and Western allies, Western financial aid is vital for the Ukrainian Government to continue financing its military, social, and humanitarian spending.

France Refused To Support British And US Airstrikes On Houthis

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/01/12/france-refuse-sign-statement-support-air-strikes/#:~:text=France%20failed%20to%20sign%20a,Diamond%2C%20with%20drones%20on%20Tuesday.>

Paris has ruled out joint action with its Western allies with its mandate excluding strikes against the rebels directly.

COMMENTS

Background

The Houthis joined the Israel-Hamas war on 31 October 23 after their third attack on Israel.[1] What began as a direct attack on Israel soon became an indirect attack on trade moving to and from Israel to cripple Israel economically. This forced the US to create a coalition of countries to protect 'Freedom of Navigation'. Till Christmas of 2023, the Houthis had undertaken 16 attacks on shipping in the Red Sea. [2] Even though the coalition under the name 'Operation Prosperity Guardian' (OPG) has been able to repel the attacks by the Houthis to protect trade in the Red Sea, the attacks continue to evolve on a regular basis. Since the first attack on ships (19 Nov 23) till 11 Jan 24, the Houthis has initiated 27 attacks in the Red Sea with no injuries or casualties reported due to the vigilance provided by OPG. This included a layered attack on 09 January in which the US and UK fighters and warships destroyed 21 drones and missiles.

Earlier on 04 January, the Houthis used an Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) laden with explosives for the first time.[3] Though the USV exploded before it hit a ship, the attack brought back memories of the attack on the Russian landing ship Olenegorsky Gorniyak by Ukraine on 04 Aug 23.[4]

Economics of OPG

The attacks carried out by the Houthis have been mostly using drones or missiles. While drones cost nearly US\$ 2,000, they need to be countered using a US\$ 1 - 2 million missile which has been used by the French, the British and the US. For the coalition, it is not the cost of the missile that matters but the cost of the naval vessel they protect which is usually in billions. The use of expensive missiles is considered justifiable as many of the attacks of the Houthis use sophisticated ammunition. Furthermore, the Houthis have been using observation drones to identify ships of interest before launching an attack.[5]

Even though no casualty has been reported, maritime trade has taken a hit with the volume of ships passing the Suez reducing by nearly 61% on a daily basis. The average container vessels on this route have reduced from 15 to 5.8 in the first week of 2024. The ships now are taking the longer route via Cape of Good Hope thereby increasing the cost of a 40 feet container by nearly 130 times to US\$ 4,406 on 11 January.[6]

HOUTHİ ATTACKS IN THE RED AND ARABIAN SEA

The Retaliation

Realising that the attacks of the Houthis will not reduce and since the Houthis used an anti-ship ballistic missile for the first time on US ships, the US led coalition took an informed decision to attack shore establishments of the Houthis in Yemen. However, the coalition could not garner the support of France and Italy. These attacks were conducted by the US and UK on 11 Jan 24 with the support from Australia, the Netherlands, Canada and Bahrain using warplanes, warships, and submarines. These attacks were broad attacks and hit 60 targets in the Houthis controlled cities of Sanaa, Al Hudaydah and Taiz as seen in Fig. 1.[7] An airport and naval base at Hodeidah, Yemen's main Red Sea port, and military sites in the coastal Hajjah governorate were also struck. This multinational attack targeted radar systems, air defence systems, and storage and launch sites for unmanned aerial systems, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles. These attacks however, did not deter the Houthis who fired a missile on ships in the Red Sea on 12 January.[8] What followed was an immediate attack on 13 January by the US on the Houthi radar site that was used to launch the missile.[9]



Figure 1: Houthi controlled cities attacked by the coalition

The Future

Predicting the future of the Israel-Hamas war would be premature. The US has so far refrained to strike the Houthis to avoid a wider conflict. While the attacks were aimed to cow the Houthis down, it has pitted the US and its allies against an Iran-backed movement. For the Houthi leader Abdul Malik Al-Houthi taking on the world's superpower is a step toward becoming a pan-Islamic ruler. Eventually, how these leaders will mould the situation is still not very clear. So far while many nations have opposed the attacks of the Houthis in the Red Sea, only a few supported the effort with assets. On the other hand, nations like Italy and France that have their assets in the region decided to refrain from direct attacks on the Houthi cities. This is indicative of the fact that the commitment of nations to be involved in a full-fledged war in the near future seems to be limited, but how will it pan out only time will dictate.

HOUTHJI ATTACKS IN THE RED AND ARABIAN SEA

Involvement of India

The Combined Maritime Force (CMF) established in April 2022 to combat the activities of illegal actors and international terrorism in the seas comprises of five combined task forces (CTF): CTF 150 (Gulf of Oman security and counter-terrorism), CTF 151 (counter piracy), CTF 152 (Arabian Gulf security and cooperation), CTF 153 (Red Sea/Gulf of Aden security and cooperation) and CTF 154 (maritime security training). The areas of responsibilities of the respective CTFs are shown in Fig. 2. The OPG forms part of CTF-153. A total of 39 nations form the CMF which include Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, India, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Singapore, Spain, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Türkiye, UAE, United Kingdom, United States and Yemen. When the CMF was established India was not a part of it. It joined the CMF as an associate member in April 2022 and then became a full member in November 2023.[10] India is part of CTF-150 wherein the area of responsibility is the Arabian Sea. Even though the US had invited India to be part of CTF-153, India has refrained from doing so.[11]



Figure 2: Areas of responsibility of CTFs [12]

Since the Red Sea is an important trade route for India to fuel its economic growth, India is keeping a close watch on the developments in this region. While India has refrained from joining the OPG, it did respond to the attacks on MV Chem Pluto in the Arabian Sea as part of the CTF-150 wherein India deploys its naval vessels for anti-piracy operations. Since 23 December 23 when MV Chem Pluto comprising of an Indian crew was attacked, the Indian Navy has systematically increased its naval presence in the region to protect the shipping interests of India and to protect the Indian crew, fleet, and freight.

HOUTHİ ATTACKS IN THE RED AND ARABIAN SEA

Accordingly, ships, Dorniers, helicopters and P8I surveillance aircrafts have been tasked for this reconnaissance. However, in an effort not to irk Iran or any of the countries of the region, India has maintained distance from the OPG by not being part of it directly and 'looking at unfolding situations closely'.^[13]

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Blinken Says Palestinian Statehood Best Way To Isolate Iran

<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/us-secretary-of-state-antony-blinken-says-palestinian-statehood-best-way-to-isolate-iran-4846312>

Amid the ongoing military operations in Gaza, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on visit to Cairo, on January 11, 2024 said the best way for Israel to normalise regional ties and isolate Iran is to agree on a Palestinian state for the resolution of the conflict, The Jerusalem Post reported. January 12, 2024.

COMMENTS

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was a week long official visit to Turkey, Greece, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the West Bank and Bahrain, meeting top officials. This was his fourth hectic trip to the West Asia and a comprehensive one at that. It is seen as an attempt by the US to douse the fire and contain the spread of conflict in the region and globally- a part of responsibility of a global power. Antony Blinken visited the UAE and Saudi Arabia on January 8, thereafter he visited Israel, Turkey and Greece. On January 13, he also met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the occupied West Bank. On January 14, he visited Jordan and Qatar.

His stated task has been to stop the conflict from spreading. The fighting appears to be as intense as before, with no indication that the Israeli government is planning to pause its campaign. Blinken urged Israel to support Palestinian leaders willing to live peacefully alongside Israelis and warned that the daily toll in its war with Hamas in Gaza was far too high. Not heeding to the advice, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister has said, "Israel has no intention of permanently occupying Gaza or displacing its civilian population. Israel is fighting Hamas terrorists, not the Palestinian population and we are doing so in full compliance with international law."

The US Department of State issued a brief statement stating that the purpose of Blinken's visit was to "discuss urgent mechanisms to stem violence, calm rhetoric and reduce regional tensions, including deterring Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea and avoiding escalation in Lebanon."

Nearly 23,000 Palestinians have been killed so far, and of those 70% of them are children, women and elderly. Over 58,000 others have been injured since Israel started its current war in Gaza on October 7. Over 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million population has been displaced due to Israeli precision air strikes and land attacks by ground forces.

One of the primary concerns for Israel and the US is a possible escalation in the fighting between Israel and its northern neighbor Hezbollah. Hezbollah has carried out attacks against



Israel and Israeli military installations since October 8 in support of Palestine, while Israel has launched airstrikes across Southern Lebanon. Over 20 Lebanese civilians and over 140 Hezbollah fighters have been killed in repeated Israeli bombings inside Lebanon. Israel targeted and assassinated senior Hamas leader Saleh al-Arouri on January 2 in Beirut as well. In response, Hezbollah has increased their missile strikes inside Israel, killing some Israeli soldiers and destroying substantial military infrastructure. Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah has repeatedly warned of dire consequences if Israel continues to attack Lebanon and drag it into the war.

In a meeting with the President of the UAE, Mohamed Bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi, Blinken reiterated US support for a two-state solution to Palestine, an issue that he also discussed with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday. He also made these remarks while addressing media persons in Egyptian capital, Cairo, he said, "We talked as well about the importance of reforming the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian governance so that it can effectively take responsibility for Gaza —so that Gaza and the West Bank can be reunited under a Palestinian leadership." US may be concerned about spread of conflict- regionally and globally- Israel's stance does not seem to be changing. Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected any moves towards a two-state solution and has been adamant to maintain security control over Gaza for an indefinite period, even after the war. The US on its part too has not offered any concrete assurances towards the long standing demand for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, indicating a lack of political will, possibly in view of elections facing it at the end-2024.

Amid war in the Middle East, India's stance has always been consistent, that as a nation we have a policy of 'no tolerance for terror', at the same time the attacks on Hamas need to stop. In fact, India on December 12, 2023 voted in favour of a draft resolution in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) emergency special resolution that demanded an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" and unconditional release of all hostages. And the 193-member UNGA overwhelmingly adopted the resolution with 153 nations voting in its favour, 10 voting against and 23 abstentions. Politically India has always maintained a stance of support for two-state solution.

China's New Port In Myanmar Is Uncomfortably Close To India's Future Nuclear Submarine Base

<https://swarajyamag.com/world/chinas-new-port-in-myanmar-is-uncomfortably-close-to-indias-future-nuclear-submarine-base>

China has speeded up the construction of the long-stalled Kyaukphyu deep-sea port on the western coast of Myanmar. This port is a part of the Chinese policy, designed to encircle India with a string of ports in the neighbourhood, that can be later converted into military facilities capable of holding expeditionary forces and supporting ships and submarines. This include Pakistan's Gwadar and Sri Lanka's Hambantota ports. The location of the Kyaukphyu Port poses a direct threat to India's eastern coast, especially considering its proximity to the key under-construction Indian naval base — INS Varsha. This base, vital for India's defence, is intended for housing nuclear attack (SSNs) and ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), allowing them to evade detection and operate clandestinely. India is likely to have only a small number of SSBNs over the next two decades. If China is able to monitor the movement of these submarines, it would be better placed to neutralise the sea leg of India's nuclear triad in the event of war. Given that the only Submarine Launch Ballistic Missile that is currently operational, the K-15, has a range of just 700 km, Indian SLBMs currently in service can hit targets in China only from a small part of the Bay of Bengal, making it easier for China to track their movement and take them out.

COMMENTS

China may have more sway over the area than just monitoring. Due to Kyaukphyu's closeness to India's northeastern states, there is a risk that China will fund insurgent activities, which could force India to reallocate resources from other crucial locations like as the Line of Actual Control (LAC). These worries are made worse by China's historical encouragement of rebellion, particularly the trafficking of arms and drugs in the Northeast. The relationships between local insurgent groups exacerbate the problem. Indian interests in Myanmar, including the Kaladan Multimodal Project, have already been targeted by the Arakan Army, which is thought to be affiliated with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which is viewed as a proxy for China. China's reliance on the Indian Ocean for trade and energy supply is another factor driving the country's haste to operationalize the Kyaukphyu Port.



Source: Swarajya

The straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok are the maritime chokepoints of the Indian Ocean, through which about 80% of China's crude oil and 60% of its trade pass. In the case of war, India might intercept this cargo and deny China its vital supplies by working with its Quad allies, the United States, Australia, and Japan. The importance of chokepoints in maritime strategy was brought to light when India showcased its long-range strike capabilities by launching a BrahMos missile from a Sukhoi Su-30 MKI that travelled nearly 1,500 kilometres from an air base in southern India. This action brought attention to this strategic weakness.

The regular hydrographic survey missions that the Chinese are mounting in the IOR are a clear indication in that regard. The Kyaukphyu Port is seen as a bypass to these chokepoints, vital for China's trade and military ambitions. The Indian government is aware of this and is taking measures to nullify these developments. This includes installing coastal radars to monitor maritime traffic and setting up the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) at Gurugram for collating and tracking all maritime activities in the region. To date, 46 radars have been installed along India's coastline, with 38 more under construction. Furthermore, 32 radars are operational in various Indian Ocean nations like the Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and Seychelles, with an additional 20 under construction in Bangladesh, fortifying its maritime surveillance capabilities.

China Issues Ominous Warning After Taiwan Elections

<https://www.kansascity.com/news/nation-world/world/article284249698.html>

China has issued its strongest statement yet since Taiwan's widely watched presidential election over the weekend, warning of severe punishment for those that defy Beijing's claim to the self-ruled island. Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, told reporters gathered at a press briefing in Cairo on Sunday that the poll's outcome—a win for staunch China-skeptic Lai Ching-te—would not change the Chinese leadership's position on the decades-old territorial dispute.

"Taiwan's independence has never been possible in the past and certainly won't be possible in the future," Wang said, according to China's official Xinhua News Service.

"Those who seek Taiwan's independence to split the Chinese territory will surely be 'severely punished' by history and the law."

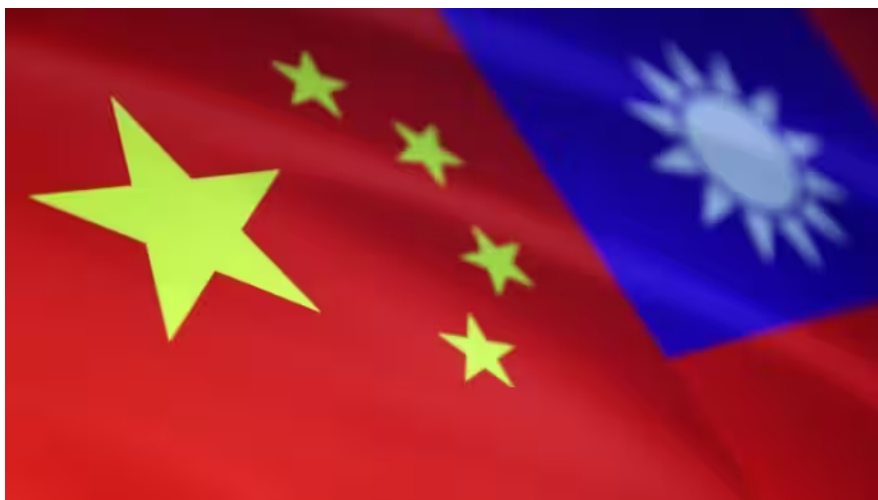
Taiwan independence is a "dead-end road," he said. On Saturday, Lai, Taiwan's current vice president from the governing Democratic Progressive Party, captured a winning plurality in a three-horse race to secure the presidency, although the DPP did not retain its majority in the island's legislature.

COMMENTS

Part of the public's perception of the survey was that it represented their rejection of Beijing's attempts to sway their choice. China claims sovereignty over Taiwan, although since the Communist conquest of the mainland in 1949, it has never held political power there. In the weeks preceding the election, Chinese officials made it apparent which candidate they supported, denouncing the DPP ticket and Lai in particular for what they saw as her pro-independence views. Lai has reassured the people of Taiwan and Taipei's foreign allies that he does not want to seek the island's formal independence, a move that may spark a conflict. Rather, he declared, his government will preserve the current situation on the other side of the Taiwan Strait. Making history, the DPP was the first political party in Taiwan's democratic post-1990s era to hold the presidency for an extended period of time.

Up until Wang, the head of the Chinese Communist Party's foreign affairs department, made his comments, China's reaction to the otherwise unfavourable verdict was comparatively subdued. Wang claimed China's claim to the island, which was a Japanese colony until 1945, by citing the historic Cairo Declaration of 1943 while standing next to his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry. Signed by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Mao Zedong's bitter rival, Chiang Kai-shek, the proclamation originated from the Cairo Conference during World War II.

It declared that China should get back the areas that Japan had taken, including Taiwan and the islands that surround it. But for Beijing's Community Party officials, the "one China" principle—which upholds Taiwan's status as a member of China while acknowledging Beijing's legitimacy—begins with the Cairo Declaration. Supporting the former stance while remaining neutral on the latter is the U.S.'s noticeably distinct one China policy. Journalist Zulkarnain Saer Khan of Bangladesh shared a note from the local Chinese embassy, recommending that media outlets report on Taiwan's elections in accordance with the one-China policy, referring to Taiwan as a territory or region rather than an independent country.



Source: India Today

‘No Delay’: ECP Says General Elections To Be Held On Time

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/01/15/ecp-says-no-delay-in-general-elections/>

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Monday expressed its inability to accept the Senate resolution seeking postponement of February 08 general elections. The election commission in a letter to the Senate Secretariat wrote that the electoral body reviewed the upper house resolution in a session.

COMMENTS

With the general elections due to be held in Pakistan on February 8th, 2024, the first fortnight of the new year saw a lot of events unfolding in the country that raised quite a few doubts about the feasibility of the elections going through on the date scheduled by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in a fair and free manner. The elections which are supposed to bring some kind of stability to the shaking political landscape of the country have themselves been seeing some uncertainties. The first major issue has been the allotment of the electoral symbol of ‘cricket bat’ to Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). At the same time, many of the PTI candidates’ nomination papers have been rejected by the respective Returning Officers (RO) on grounds the party calls flimsy and states that the move is politically-motivated. The PTI has even urged the Supreme Court of Pakistan to take notice of the situation which indicates the plan to manipulate the electoral process by the state apparatus. The ECP passed an order last month deeming PTI’s intra-party polls, that elected Barrister Gohar Khan as the PTI chairman, unconstitutional and revoked the party’s electoral symbol. The PTI approached the Peshawar High Court (PHC) which after initial back and forth set aside the ECP’s order which allowed the PTI to use its electoral symbol for the upcoming elections. The ECP, subsequently, approached the Supreme Court against the PHC’s decision. The Supreme Court said in its verdict that the PTI had failed to present evidence of holding transparent intra-party elections and declared PHC’s decision null and void stripping the PTI of its electoral symbol. The implication of the decision is that the PTI cannot now contest the elections and its members will have to contest the elections as independents with individual electoral symbols allotted by the ECP. The PTI even tried to make a deal with the PTI Nazriati group to contest elections on its ‘Batsman’ symbol but the ECP foiled its move. Those PTI candidates whose nominations have been cleared have been allotted individual electoral symbols. Another development in this fortnight has been the decision by Pakistan’s Supreme Court that declared the disqualification for lawmakers under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution null and void on the ground that it “abridges the fundamental right of citizens to contest elections and vote for a candidate of their choice” and backed the five-year ban legislated by the Shehbaz Sharif government last year. This decision has cleared all obstacles in the eligibility of PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif from contesting the elections while legally debarring PTI’s incarcerated Imran Khan from the same. There was also a surprise thrown by the Upper House of the Parliament in Pakistan wherein 14 lawmakers passed a resolution seeking to delay the polls due to security concerns in view of the recent attacks on the JUI-F chief Fazlur

Rehman, former lawmaker Mohsin Dawar, and other political figures, possibility of low voter turnout in colder weather regions of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the threat of militant attack on election rallies. The resolution was moved by an independent senator in a session attended by 15 lawmakers only. However, the ECP has declared that the elections are going to be held as scheduled and that no order other than that of the Supreme Court of Pakistan can affect the same.

So how does the electoral battlespace look like three weeks before the General Elections are scheduled to take place. Nawaz Sharif has been cleared to contest the elections whereas Imran Khan has been debarred from it. The PTI cannot contest the elections as it has been deprived of its electoral symbol and nomination papers of many PTI members have not been cleared effectively putting PTI out of the race. Even though PTI has declared that it will not boycott the elections and those cleared will contest independently, majority of those voting for them will remain confused in the absence of the party's symbol. This practically leaves only the PML-N and PPP as the major players but there are many who still follow Imran Khan and the provinces have different parties with their strongholds. The population of the economically suffering Pakistan is battered with high inflation, poverty and food shortages and is seeing growing anti-military sentiments has different priorities. With another three weeks to go for the elections and a lot of turmoil in the country, the outcome of the elections cannot be predicted easily. Who will have the Indian government to deal with post February 8th is difficult to say as the world watches the on-goings in Pakistan closely.

Sri Lanka To Deploy Naval Vessel In Red Sea To Fight Houthi Attacks: President Ranil Wickremesinghe

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/sri-lanka-to-deploy-naval-vessel-in-red-sea-to-fight-houthi-attacks-president-ranil-wickremesinghe/articleshow/106544614.cms?utm_source=whatsapp_pwa&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=socialsharebuttons&from=mdr

President Ranil Wickremesinghe declared that Sri Lanka will contribute a Navy vessel to counter Houthi rebel attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea. This aligns Sri Lanka with nations such as India in safeguarding the vital waterway for global trade.

COMMENTS

The Houthis have been attacking merchant shipping in the Red Sea since November last year in retaliation to the ongoing Israeli operations in the Gaza strip. The attacks have disrupted the shipping lanes in the region that carries 30 percent of the global container traffic and 12 percent of the global trade.[1] The resulting bypassing of the strait via Cape of Good Hope has resulted in increase in the distance, duration and cost of the shipping consignments affecting the prices of commodities in concerned countries. The US-led alliance launched the 'Operation Prosperity Guardians' for protection of commercial shipping against the Houthi attacks. The Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe has decided to join the fight by sending a Sri Lanka Navy vessel to the Red Sea, however, his decision has not found many supporters in the country.

The cost of the mission has been reported to be SL Rs 250 million every fortnight. The opposition has questioned the decision by asking how the President could afford to spend Rs 250 million fortnightly on such a mission when the bankrupt country is reeling under unprecedented economic crisis and its population is facing starvation. The decision is being seen as being against Sri Lanka's non-aligned foreign policy by sending the ship in support of US and Israel and becoming complicit in Israel's war crimes as seen by the members of the opposition.



Source: Daily Express News

The SL government, however, clarifies the move as not being in support of any particular country but being a step in the direction towards Sri Lanka's international obligation to combat terrorism and its commitment to fulfilling its maritime responsibilities. The ministers from the ruling party were quoted saying that when the country expects the international community to support it, Sri Lanka also needs to uphold its part of the bargain.

The Defence State Minister Pramita Bandara Tennakoon also said that no additional expenses would be incurred towards this mission as the Sri Lankan Navy already operates on the high seas in this region.[2] However, as per the naval sources, the Sri Lankan Navy, presently, does not possess any vessel equipped with suitable weapon systems to meet threat of drones and unmanned surface vessels and is in the process arranging the necessary logistics and fuel supplies and the required weapon systems to be prepared should the need arise to send the vessel.

Sri Lanka and its population face overwhelming economic woes and the decision of sending a vessel to Red Sea costing Rs 250 million fortnightly needs to be thought through carefully. Though it can be said that Sri Lanka's heart is in the right place as it intends to fulfil its global commitment by contributing to the efforts in the Red Sea, but does its purse allow it. Moreover, the cost of equipping the vessel to counter the threats would be an additional cost. The world would understand if Sri Lanka pays attention to recovering its economy and providing relief to its people.

[1] Chaterjee, Adrija. "Red Sea crisis fallout may show up in India's January trade data: Official". Money Control, January 15, 2024. <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/red-sea-crisis-fallout-may-show-up-in-indias-january-trade-data-official-12056511.html>

[2] Indrajith, Saman. "Govt. justifies sending warship to Red Sea". The Island, January 10, 2024. <https://island.lk/govt-justifies-sending-warship-to-red-sea/>

People's Democratic Party Wins Elections in Bhutan

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/peoples-democratic-party-wins-elections-in-bhutan/>

Winning 30 of 47 seats in the final round of Bhutan's fourth general election on January 9, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) is set to form the next government in the country and party chief Tshering Tobgay will be sworn in as the new prime minister. This will be Tobgay's second stint as prime minister, after he helmed the PDP government from 2013-2018. This is the fourth peaceful power transfer since the Bhutanese monarchy introduced democracy to the Himalayan kingdom in 2008. The PDP was expected to win the election. Economic woes were at the center of the election for a nation that pioneered the concept of Gross National Happiness to measure development. Bhutan's GDP has grown at a meager average of 1.6 percent in the last five years despite recovering to 4.5 percent in 2022. Three out of 10 youths are unemployed and a record number of young people are migrating abroad seeking better opportunities.

Similarly, one in every eight people struggle to meet their basic needs for food and other necessities. The PDP has acknowledged that its responsibilities are colossal. It made 13 pledges, promising to put the Bhutanese "economy back on track, enable private businesses to thrive, increase job opportunities, revitalise education and healthcare systems, uplift the power, empower civil servants, transform agriculture and boost national revenue generation" over the next five years. Specifically, it promised to double Bhutan's GDP by \$5 billion, create 10,000 jobs annually, increase the manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP from 6 to 30 percent and increase foreign direct investment from \$500 million to \$6 billion during its term in office.

Besides, it aims to establish special economic zones and even allow the establishment of casinos in the Southern border towns bordering India to attract investment and tourism. Tobgay considers the Bhutan-India ties a role model for other countries and has promised special economic ties with India. Tobgay and the new government have an unenviable challenge. They face a "grave existential crisis" at home and a delicate geopolitical balance in the region. Nevertheless, they have made an audacious promise to transform Bhutan into a developed nation in the next five years. Previous governments have failed to keep their promises and the electorate has not continued any government to a second consecutive term.

COMMENTS

Tobgay is considered a pro India figure and had developed cordial relations with India during his previous prime ministerial stint from 2013 to 2018.

The victory of Tobgay and the PDP is being viewed as a favourable situation for India, especially at a time, when there are some speculations of Bhutan China border talks. Being a tri-junction, the contentious China Bhutan boundary areas necessarily need an Indian involvement for resolution and the new Bhutanese leadership needs to handle this sensitive matter extremely cautiously.

Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) – 2023

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1988673>

The 8th edition of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs was conducted by Royal Thai Navy at Bangkok, Thailand from 19 – 22 Dec 23. Chiefs of Navies/ Senior Delegates from 27 Members/ Observer countries participated in the event. Admiral R Hari Kumar, Chief of the Naval Staff, attended the event with a three member Indian Naval delegation.

COMMENTS

Background

The 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' (IONS) is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues. In the process, it endeavours to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly cooperative solutions on the way ahead.

Highlights of the Conclave

Thailand assumed the duties of Chair of IONS and Work Plan for next two years was finalised. As a first, Flag designed by India was selected as the IONS Flag.

India also took over as the co-Chair of IONS Working Groups on Maritime Security and HADR for the forthcoming cycle. Republic of Korea Navy was welcomed by the Conclave as the latest 'Observer', raising the collective strength of IONS to 34 (25 Members & 09 Observers).

During the Conclave, CNS, IN held an interaction with Commander-in-Chief, of Royal Thai Navy. Both Leaders expressed commitment towards sustaining an upward trajectory of Bilateral Defence engagements. The CNS also interacted with Heads of Delegation from Australia, Bangladesh, France, Iran, Italy, Malaysia, Maldives, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Spain, and discussed bilateral maritime issues.

Implications for India

India as a net security provider for the IOR region needs to forge strong ties with navies of IOR littoral nations towards achieving enhanced MDA, develop common response mechanisms against emerging threats, promoting blue economy and securing its maritime security interests.

India is also scheduled to take over as the Chair of IONS (2025-27) during 9th CoC planned to be conducted in India in end 2025.

UK to Deploy Royal Navy Warships To Indian Ocean As Sign Of Close Strategic Ties With India

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/uk-to-deploy-royal-navy-warships-to-indian-ocean-as-sign-of-close-strategic-ties-with-india-defence-secy-shapps-13599052.html>

Defence Secretary Grant Shapps, who co-chaired an India-UK Defence Industry CEOs Roundtable with visiting Defence Minister Rajnath Singh following their bilateral talks earlier, said the Littoral Response Group (LRG) will be deployed this year in the IOR and the Carrier Strike Group (CRG) in 2025 for joint India-UK training.

During the talks the two senior ministers discussed future defence cooperation, from joint exercises to knowledge sharing and instructor exchanges, which build on the comprehensive strategic partnership envisaged in the 2030 India-UK Roadmap.

COMMENTS



Source: PTI

India-UK ties have recently been upgraded to a 2+2 mechanism, a template taken from Japan to navigate foreign and defence relations with a few strategic partners, US, Japan, Australia, Russia and now the UK.

Implications

The deployment of the UK's "most advanced naval capabilities" has been flagged by the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) as a "decisive step" in bolstering UK-India security ties and the India UK strategic defence partnership has been stepped up as Indian Defence Minister makes his first visit to the UK.

In the coming years, the UK and India will also embark on more complex exercises between their respective militaries, building up to a landmark joint exercise to be conducted before the end of 2030, supporting shared goals of protecting critical trade routes and upholding the international rules-based system. The most significant India-UK project currently underway is the co-development of gas-turbine propulsion technology for India's next-generation fighter-aircraft engines by Rolls Royce and DRDO. The visit has given impetus to the initiative.

Sudan's Army Chief Rejects Negotiations With Rival RSF

<https://www.africanews.com/2024/01/06/sudans-army-chief-rejects-negotiations-with-rival-rsf/>

Al-Burhan cited war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed by the RSF of General Mohamad Hamdan Daglo. Speaking to soldiers in the Red Sea state (eastern Sudan) the head of the Sudanese armed forces asserted that the RSF perpetrated crimes "in West Darfur and across Sudan". He said they made any reconciliation or deal with the RSF unacceptable. This comes as the warring generals agreed last month to a face-to-face meeting and to start talks over a possible cease-fire, according to the East African regional bloc IGAD. RSF commander Hamdan Daglo spent the first months of the war in the shadows but was active on social media.

COMMENTS

Overview of the refusal of Sudan's army to negotiate with RSF and Implications on Indian Peace Keeping Forces

The refusal of the Commander in Chief of Sudan's army to engage in negotiations with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) raises significant concerns and potential implications for the Indian peacekeeping force operating in Sudan.

This situation demands a careful analysis of the broader political and security landscape, considering both immediate and long-term consequences. Firstly, the rejection of negotiations between the Sudanese army and RSF indicates heightened tensions and potential internal conflicts within Sudan. This not only jeopardizes the country's stability but also poses a direct threat to the safety and effectiveness of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission, including the Indian contingent.

The Indian peacekeeping force, like any other international contingent, operates under the mandate of the UN to maintain peace and security. In a scenario where the Sudanese national army refuses negotiations, the risk of increased violence and conflict escalations becomes a reality. This can significantly impede the peacekeeping force's ability to fulfil its mandate, as their operations are contingent on the cooperation and stability of the host country.

Moreover, the refusal to negotiate with a paramilitary force like RSF may lead to a more complex security environment. The peacekeeping force could find itself caught in the crossfire or facing challenges in distinguishing between conflicting parties. This heightened risk could result in casualties among peacekeepers and undermine the overall credibility of the UN mission. Additionally, the Indian peacekeeping force may face challenges in implementing its humanitarian and development projects in the absence of a negotiated settlement.



Source: Africa News

The refusal of the army to engage in dialogue with RSF could hinder efforts to address the root causes of the conflict and promote sustainable peace. The UN, in response to such a situation, may need to reassess its peacekeeping strategy in Sudan. This might involve diplomatic efforts to encourage dialogue, increased intelligence and security measures for peacekeepers, and potentially reconsidering the overall mandate and presence of the peacekeeping force in the region.

The refusal of the Commander in Chief of Sudan's army to negotiate with RSF has profound implications for the Indian peacekeeping force and the broader UN mission. It calls for a strategic and adaptive response to ensure the safety of peacekeepers, uphold the mission's mandate, and contribute to the long-term stability of Sudan. The international community must closely monitor the situation, engage in diplomatic initiatives, and be prepared to recalibrate peacekeeping strategies in response to evolving circumstances.

Challenges for the Indian Peacekeeping Force

(a) Operational difficulties in a volatile environment. The Indian peacekeeping force may be forced to carry out its operations within an increasingly volatile environment as a result must guard and take adequate measure for not getting entangled in human rights violations.

(b) Risk of peacekeepers caught in the crossfire. The potential dangers of peacekeepers getting entangled in conflicts between the national army and RSF may arise which must be kept in perspective while performing peace keeping duties.

(c) Complexity in distinguishing conflicting parties. The difficulties peacekeepers may encounter in distinguishing between conflicting parties, especially in a scenario where negotiations have failed have increased due to the failed negotiations which must be kept in perspective by commanders as all levels.

Need for UN Response and Reassessment. The failed attempt to restore peace mandates UN to reevaluate its presence in Sudan to adapt to the evolving situation. The need for a proactive and adaptive response from the international community to address the evolving situation is must at this juncture. The importance of continuous monitoring of the situation and ongoing diplomatic initiatives to ensure long-term stability in Sudan needs to be thought.

Chinese Military Irked By Indian Navy Drill With Philippines

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/106359740.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Peeved over the recent military exercise between the navies of India and Philippines in the disputed South China Sea, Chinese military on Thursday said defence corporation between two countries should not harm the interests of third countries and regional peace. Answering a question on Chinese media about naval exercises between Indian and Philippines naval battleships plans by France to hold naval and air drills with Philippine Navy, spokesman of Chinese defence ministry senior colonel Wu Quin said China has taken note of the reports.

COMMENTS

A number of geopolitical concerns have been raised as a result of naval drills that India and the Philippines have performed in the contentious South China Sea. Within the South China Sea, China, Vietnam, and the Philippines all have territorial claims that overlap with one another, making it a contentious region. It is clear that India is dedicated to maintaining international maritime law and freedom of navigation, as seen by its participation in these drills. The punitive actions taken by China, on the other hand, provide cause for worry. In order to improve both India's security and its economic cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, the 'Act East' strategy has been implemented. The statement issued by the Chinese military underlines the need of preserving calm and preserving equilibrium in regions that are not under Chinese control. In order to successfully navigate this geopolitical landscape, India must exercise caution, taking into consideration its national interests, the stability of the region, and its allies. When it comes to managing the possible consequences, diplomatic channels will be absolutely essential. There is a clear indication that India is adhering to international rules and strategic objectives via its activities.



Source: The Times of India

Japan And ASEAN Bolster Ties At A Summit Focused On Security And Economy Amid Tensions With China.

<https://apnews.com/article/japan-asean-summit-maritime-security-china-8ff28376dc10f9a5f95b93c4c7c7c7dc>

TOKYO (AP) — Leaders from Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, at a special summit in Tokyo on Sunday, adopted a joint vision that emphasizes security and economic cooperation while respecting the rule of law, amid growing tensions with China in regional seas.

Ties between Japan and the 10-member ASEAN bloc used to be largely based on Japanese assistance to the developing economies, in part due to lingering bitterness over Japan's wartime actions. But in recent years the relationship has focused more on security amid China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea, while Japan's postwar pacifist stance and trust-building efforts have fostered friendlier relations.

The summit marks the 50th anniversary of official Japan-ASEAN ties, which started in 1973 with trade talks over Japanese synthetic rubber exports

COMMENTS

During a discussion on security and economics, Japan and ASEAN have reinforced their contacts with one another, with a particular emphasis on the stability of the area and possible dangers. A peaceful Indo-Pacific region is a top priority for India's foreign policy, but the country must also strike a balance between its relations with China and Japan.

Commercial activity, investment, and technological advancement might all benefit from economic collaboration between Japan and ASEAN. When it comes to capitalizing on these opportunities and competing with other countries, India should properly position itself. Through Japan-ASEAN cooperation, the summit presents India with economic opportunities that have the ability to enhance the country's economy.

By strengthening strategic alliances with ASEAN states, it may be possible to boost military coordination, joint exercises, and information sharing. It is important for India to maintain communication with Japan and ASEAN in order to foster stability in the area and develop the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region to reflect India's values and interests.

Following the conference between Japan and ASEAN, India is confronted with a challenging geopolitical climate. It is imperative that India maintains regional stability and protects its national interests, all while exploring opportunities for economic engagement and strategic alliances.

Indian, Japanese Coast Guards Engage In Joint Exercise Off The Coast Of Chennai

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/indian-japanese-coast-guards-engage-in-joint-exercise-off-the-coast-of-chennai/article67733952.ece>

The camaraderie between the Indian and Japanese Coast Guards was on display in the Bay of Bengal off the Chennai coast on Friday, January 12, 2024, as their vessels and aircraft were involved in a joint exercise, practising various procedures. Besides ICGS Shaurya, ICGS Shaunak, ICGS Sujay, ICGS Samudra Paheredar, ICGS Rani Abbakka and ICGS Annie Besant, ICGS C-440 and ICGS C-449 represented the Indian side, while visiting JCGS Yashima represented the Japanese during the exercise.

COMMENTS

The main objective of such joint exercises is to improve communication and understanding between the maritime organisations of both India and Japan. Commencing interoperability in communication, bolstering the operating procedures and sharing best practices remain some of the significant concerns for such joint exercises. This also enables both the maritime agencies to collaborate on common interests such as search and rescue missions, protecting the marine environment etc. apart from strengthening their bilateral relations.

The Coast Guards of India and Japan conducted their 20th joint drill off the coast of Chennai. The exercise involved six aircraft, the Indian Coast Guard ships Shaunak, Shaurya, Sujay, Samudra Paheredar, Rani Abbakka, Annie Besant, C-440, Sagar Anveshika, and Matsya Drushti, six aircraft and the Japanese Coast Guard ship Yashima.

According to a release, India and Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in 2006, which is why Yashima visited the Indian coast. In order to promote communication between the two Coast Guards, the MoC organises yearly combined exercises, high-level visits, and short-term workshops.

Donny Michael, inspector general, Headquarters, Coast Guard Region (East) addressed reporters about the benefits of the exercise. He stated that the JCG had previously taught the ICG new skills, and that now that learning would be reciprocal along with strengthening of friendly relationships between the two countries.[1] Michael further emphasised the ICG's cooperation with the state government and the pollution control board, as well as their experience in cleaning up oil spills at Ennore Creek. He brought up the difficulties in handling oil spills in the water in India, pointing out that the country has less private participants than other nations, which procrastinate the responses to such disasters.

[1] The New Indian Express, (2024), "20th India-Japan Coast Guard exercise, a feast for eyes", [Online: web], Accessed 13 January 2024, URL:

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/2024/Jan/13/20th-india-japan-coast-guard-exercise-a-feast-for-eyes-2650569.html>



Source: Times of India

Japan Coast Guard's Commander Yoshihiro Shimizu, Director-International Relations, said: "We will continue to further strengthen the cooperation between both sides through joint drills and exercises and the exchange of opinions." [2]

The collaboration of the maritime services between India and Japan plays a significant role in maintaining regional security and stability. India and Japan have collaborated on infrastructure projects in the Bay of Bengal, which is a crucial region for trade and transport.

This includes projects like LNG infrastructure development in Sri Lanka and road infrastructure in Bangladesh. Such initiatives provide alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative and aim to boost regional connectivity and trade. Their cooperation, along with other initiatives like the Quad (involving the US and Australia), aims to balance power dynamics in the region, particularly in the face of China's growing influence.

Apart from this, both India and Japan have been actively supporting Southeast Asian countries by providing maritime equipment and infrastructure, as well as training for naval and air force personnel. This support is crucial for maintaining a balance of power and enhancing maritime security in the region.

[2] The Hindu Bureau (2024), "Indian, Japanese Coast Guards engage in joint exercise off the coast of Chennai", [Online: web], Accessed 13 January 2024, URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/indian-japanese-coast-guards-engage-in-joint-exercise-off-the-coast-of-chennai/article67733952.ece>

Diesel Exports to Europe at Record High in December as Flows Shift From Latin America

<https://indianexpress.com/article/business/diesel-exports-to-europe-at-record-high-in-dec-as-flows-shift-from-latin-america-9106006/>

India's diesel exports to Europe touched an all-time high in December, largely due to a recent shift in flows away from the Latin American market, where American refiners are now trying to gain a foothold, as per an analysis of ship tracking data. The displacement of Russian fuels away from Europe — the major reason that led to the spurt in Indian fuel exports to the continent in the aftermath of the Ukraine invasion — also continues to play a role in the equation.

As per data from commodity market analytics firm Kpler, India exported 2,74,321 barrels of diesel per day to Europe in December, higher than the previous record of 2,69,585 barrels per day (bpd) in September. In the 11 months of 2023 preceding December, diesel exports to Europe averaged 2,08,709 bpd. In 2022, the year Russia invaded Ukraine, diesel exports to Europe from India averaged 83,608 bpd, the data shows.

COMMENTS

The displacement of Russian fuels away from Europe — the major reason that led to the spurt in Indian fuel exports to the continent in the aftermath of the Ukraine invasion — also continues to play a role in the equation.

In December, India set a record for diesel exports to Europe, driven by a shift away from the Latin American market. The displacement of Russian fuels in Europe, following the Ukraine invasion, and the US Gulf Coast refineries' influence in Argentina contributed to this surge. India's role as a major oil refiner, purchasing Russian oil and supplying refined products to Europe, helps maintain a global demand-supply balance and prevents extreme price shocks, making it more acceptable to the West. The increase in diesel imports from India underscores a significant transformation in oil trading following the conflict initiated by the Ukraine. Earlier Russia held the position of being Europe's primary diesel supplier, crucial for industrial and transportation needs. However, the European Union imposed a ban on most seaborne imports of Russian crude in December, followed by a prohibition on oil products in February 2022.

A trade source highlighted that India witnessed a decline in the consumption of petrol and diesel for two consecutive months in November and December 2023.[1] The reduction in consumption is attributed to factors such as sluggish manufacturing and construction activity, along with the influence of interest rates and a mild winter.

[1] 'Fuel, Power Demand down in Dec as Festive Buzz Fades'. The Times of India, 2 Jan. 2024. The Economic Times - The Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/indias-energy-demand-catches-winter-chill-in-december/articleshow/106463260.cms>.

These consumption trends are not only impacting the domestic market but are also expected to have repercussions on Europe, affecting the export volumes of diesel and gas oil, Vortexa's Head of APAC Analysis, Serena Huang told businessline. [2]

According to ship tracking data analyzed by commodity market analytics firm Kpler, India achieved a daily diesel export rate of 274,321 barrels to Europe in December. This surpassed the previous record of 269,585 barrels per day (bpd) recorded in September. In the 11 months leading up to December 2023, diesel exports to Europe averaged 208,709 bpd. [3] In contrast, in 2022, the year of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, diesel exports from India to Europe averaged 83,608 bpd. [4]

Due to reduced diesel imports from RIL (Reliance Industries Limited) in Latin America, the company now has a surplus of diesel that can be redirected to Europe. Europe remains a high-demand market for the fuel, facing a shortage of approximately 700,000 barrels per day (bpd) on a net basis. Historically, a significant portion of diesel consumed in Europe originated from Russia. However, with Western nations reducing dependence on Russian oil and fuels, the continent has been exploring alternative source markets, including India, for fuel imports. [5]

Indian refineries operated beyond their designated capacity of 5 million barrels per day (mbd) in November, processing 5.17 mbd of crude. Concurrently, domestic diesel demand experienced a 3% year-on-year decline in November, resulting in a surplus that refiners could export. With a shift away from the Latin American market and increased exports to Europe, India is diversifying its markets.

This move is strategic, especially considering the challenges in the Latin American market and the geopolitical developments affecting Russian fuel exports to Europe. India's record diesel exports to Europe indicate an expanded and significant role in the global oil market. This helps in maintaining a demand-supply balance and prevents extreme price shocks, making India more acceptable to Western nations.

[1] 'Diesel Exports to Europe at Record High in Dec as Flows Shift from Latin America'. The Indian Express, 12 Jan. 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/diesel-exports-to-europe-at-record-high-in-dec-as-flows-shift-from-latin-america-9106006/>.

[2] PressReader.Com - Digital Newspaper & Magazine Subscriptions. <https://www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20240112/282325389818413>. Accessed 17 Jan. 2024.

[3] Sharma, Sukalp. "Diesel Exports to Europe at Record High in Dec as Flows Shift from Latin America." The Indian Express, January 12, 2024. <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/diesel-exports-to-europe-at-record-high-in-dec-as-flows-shift-from-latin-america-9106006/>.

[4] 'Diesel Exports to Europe at Record High in Dec as Flows Shift from Latin America'. The Indian Express, 12 Jan. 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/diesel-exports-to-europe-at-record-high-in-dec-as-flows-shift-from-latin-america-9106006/>.

Tu-142 Anti-Sub Aircraft Continue The ‘Arctic Long Flights’ – RuMoD

<https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2024/01/06/tu-142-anti-sub-aircraft-continue-the-arctic-long-flights-rumod/>

The Ministry's military department, in a news release, stated, "Our Northern Fleet's long-range Tu-142 anti-submarine aircraft crews will persist with their extended flights in key operation zones within the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans." This responsibility is slated to be one of the focal points for pilots operating these aircraft in the upcoming year, as per the Russian military's statement.

COMMENTS

With the beginning of 2024, Russia has extensively employed its Northern Fleet's aviation resources to map the Arctic and Atlantic oceans. The Russian hawk-eyed approach comes at a time when an increased naval presence from the USA, France and the UK can be observed in the region. The Virginia Class and Los Angeles Class from the USA, Rubis Class from France, and Trafalgar Class, along with the Astute Class from the UK, are all nuclear-powered fast attack submarines designed for a broad spectrum of open-ocean and littoral missions, including anti-submarine warfare and intelligence gathering.

Russia, similar to the US policy of 'toe-to-toe, ship-to-ship', has employed the Tupolev Tu-142, a highly advanced aircraft designed for anti-submarine warfare, to continue with ice reconnaissance in the Arctic and Atlantic oceans. This long-range patrol aircraft, also known as the Bear-F in the West, is equipped with cutting-edge technology to detect and engage enemy submarines using magnetic anomaly detectors, up to 12 torpedoes, search and targeting radars and sonobuoys. [1] This advanced naval vessel is equipped with various cutting-edge weapons, including anti-ship missiles, automatic cannons, an infrared tracker and self-guided missiles. [2] Its deployment significantly enhances naval combat capabilities and ensures greater security on the high seas.

The aircraft, a maritime patrol version of the Tu-95 strategic bomber, has successfully carried out multiple missions in international airspace over the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, with each mission lasting up to 12 hours and covering an impressive distance of 8000 kilometres. [3] Russia has employed this aircraft for electronic intelligence (ELINT), search and rescue missions, maritime reconnaissance, and anti-submarine warfare in the Arctic region. In 1988, the Indian Navy inducted the Tu-142 aircraft from Russia, which proved invaluable to their operations and naval exercises. The Tu-142M played a crucial role in the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) operations in Sri Lanka during the 1980s and was instrumental in Operation Cactus in 1988. The aircraft served with pride for 30 years until it was de-inducted in 2018, making way for the P-8I maritime surveillance aircraft.

ARCTIC

The Northern Highlands region is of immense strategic value, serving as a natural barrier against potential threats and providing an ideal location for monitoring and controlling the envisaged maritime route via the Northern Sea Route (NSR). The Arctic presents significant strategic advantages and economic opportunities; however, the current environment also witnesses a high bid of territorial contestations from substantial powers.

The Arctic region is witnessing a silent yet intense arms race to enhance marine capabilities, and Russia is leading the way with its extraordinary efforts. Russia is conducting frequent sorties with its Tu-142 aircraft to closely monitor and track the movements of 'enemy' ships and conducting ice navigation drills to prepare its submariners for the challenging Arctic environment. In January 2024, Russia announced its plan to fortify its submarine readiness in the Arctic, acknowledging the changing nature of the region and confidently announcing its ability to handle any challenge that may arise. [4] The Bear-F and Tula nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine have already demonstrated their ability to navigate through ice, a crucial skill in the Arctic.[5] Russia's intensified focus on expanding its regional infrastructure is a testament to its unwavering commitment to the Arctic's security.

The current contestations in the Arctic present an excellent opportunity for India and Russia to join hands and protect their strategic interests in the region. India has a vested interest in the Arctic in the form of scientific research, tapping natural resources, and studying geophysics and with its maiden winter expedition to the Arctic commencing last year, it can surely benefit from a trusted partner with major stakes in the region.



Source: Bulgarian Military

[1] BNN Correspondents, "Russia's Tu-142 Aircraft to Continue Patrolling Atlantic and Arctic Oceans in 2024", BNN Breaking, 06 January, 2024. <https://bnnbreaking.com/world/russia/russias-tu-142-aircraft-to-continue-patrolling-atlantic-and-arctic-oceans-in-2024/#:~:text=Its%20primary%20objective%20is%20anti,part%20of%20the%20Russian%20Navy.>

[2] Jon Lake, "RAF Typhoons scrambled to intercept Bears over the North Sea", Key Aero, 02 September, 2023. <https://www.key.aero/article/raf-typhoons-scrambled-intercept-bears-over-north-sea>

[3] Boyko Nikolov, "Tu-142 anti-sub aircraft continue the 'Arctic long flights' - RuMoD", Bulgarian Military, 06 January, 2024. <https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2024/01/06/tu-142-anti-sub-aircraft-continue-the-arctic-long-flights-rumod/>

[4] Ashish Dangwal, "Floating Under Ice' - Russian Navy's Nuclear Submarines Set To Conduct Ice Navigation Drills In The Arctic", Eurasian Times, 05 January, 2024. <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/floating-under-ice-russian-navys-nuclear-submarines/>

[5] Ibid.