



CENTRE FOR
JOINT WARFARE
STUDIES
(CENJOWS)

GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

16 - 31 JANUARY 2024

**Pakistan
Conducts
'Precision
Military Strikes'
Against
'Terrorist
Hideouts' In
Iran's Sistan-
Balochistan
Province, 7
Killed**

*India, France
Sign Pact To
Jointly Develop,
Launch Military
Satellites*

**North Korea's
Rejection of
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**Navy To Monitor Chinese
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**ICJ Tells Israel To
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ICJ Tells Israel To 'Prevent Genocide' In Gaza, Rejects Ordering Immediate Ceasefire

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/icj-tells-israel-to-prevent-genocide-in-gaza-rejects-ordering-immediate-ceasefire/>

In its decision, the Hague court finds there is 'plausibility' to South Africa's claims that the rights of Palestinians not to be subjected to genocide must be urgently protected.

COMMENTS

The ruling at The ICJ Hague decided that Israelis are obligated to take measures to avoid massacre in the Strip and to decrease death and devastation in the ravaged Palestinian enclave. However, the jury failed to reach an agreement if Israel engaged in ethnic cleansing. Further, it did not mandate Israel to halt its armed assault against Hamas, as the South African government had demanded. The South African lawmakers justified the case last month by comparing their apartheid-era persecution with Palestinians' misery. The racial cleansing claim is particularly contentious for the State of Israel on the fallout of the Holocaust. For Palestinians, the jury's ruling marked an unparalleled moment of reflection for Tel Aviv, whose quest is aggressively supported by the US and Western allies. Over 25,000 individuals have been killed in Gaza since Israel's onslaught started, more than two million are refugees, and fifty percent of the populace is on the brink of malnutrition, based on WHO reports and UNDP professionals. While the verdict is deemed legally enforceable, the ruling body has no way of implementing it. However, it has asked Israelis to give an update upon its accomplishments within one month.

Additionally, Israeli officials submitted documentation both at the UN and to the US, linking employees from the Palestinian The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) inciting violence that followed the Hamas-led onslaught on Israelis. The claims spurred eight nations, particularly the US, to withhold certain aid payments, even though the conflict had plunged Palestinians in the Strip through grave circumstances. The Israeli claims emerged on the same day of the ruling, following years of discord with UNRWA. Since 1949, the organisation has catered for the households of Palestinians who either left or were compelled to leave their dwellings amid the battles that preceded the establishment of Israel. Impartiality in a ruling may be challenging for an area where ideological and political disagreements have been vigorously debated for years, and especially amid a polarising conflict. Access to credible evidence is limited, particularly in Gaza, where intense bombing and power shortages impede attempts to verify allegations. Threats and intimidation have also escalated in the past three months.

Further, reports surfaced that both parties are likely to achieve a deal that would result in releasing of numerous Palestinian security detainees and an extended pause in combat in Gaza in exchange for the hostages. However, the Israeli Knesset maintains staunchly that Tel Aviv will retain armed authority over the Strip post-conflict, allowing it to function in the same manner as it operates throughout the West Bank. This dichotomy has pushed its Western allies like the UK also to promote a five-point proposal that includes a cease-fire, a "political horizon" towards the 'two-state arrangement', and a competent Palestinian administration in the Strip and the rest of the West Bank, with the Hamas leadership expected to be exiled. Representatives from both sides said they anticipate within the pause and hostage deal, more thorough conversations regarding an indefinite ceasefire. For the time being, both Hamas and Israeli leaderships have opposed to several of these requests.

Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

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Ukrainian Offensive

A Ukrainian drone struck an oil storage depot in Klinty in western Russia on January 19, 2024, and also attacked a gunpowder mill in Tambov, about 600 km south of Moscow. These strikes by Ukraine are part of President Zelensky's vow to hit targets deep into Russia using long-range drones. Ukrainian forces are effectively using FPV drones to target and neutralize Russian troops and equipment along the Dnipro River in an attempt to protect their tactically important bridgeheads. Reports from the battlefield hint at a high rate of success for Ukraine against Russian military equipment near Krynky. On January 21, 2024, Ukrainian forces shelled the market on the outskirts of the city in the Donetsk region, killing 27 people, which is one of four in eastern Ukraine that Russia annexed last year. A fire broke out at a chemical transport terminal at Russia's Ust Luga port, which was hit by drones. On January 24, 2024, one Ilyushin Il-76 transport aircraft crashed in the Belgorod region when it was ferrying 65 Ukrainians for a prisoner's exchange. Six crew members also perished in the incident. Russia is blaming Kyiv's missiles for the crash. On January 29, 2024, Russian missiles and drones struck civilian and infrastructure targets across Ukraine.

Weapon Support

NATO signed a 1.1 billion euro (USD 1.2 billion) contract for hundreds of thousands of 155mm artillery rounds on Tuesday, some of which will be supplied to Ukraine after Kyiv complained of ammunition shortages. The agreement is likely to yield about 220,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, with the first deliveries expected at the end of 2025.

Drones

Ukraine has indigenously developed drones, which are large UAVs with repeaters to relay signals and control latent kamikaze drones to strike Russian Soldiers. Russia has claimed to have developed a convertiplane capable of vertical landing and take-off, much like the CV-22. A convertiplane is an aircraft that, during a routine flight, changes to a fixed-wing lift using rotor power for vertical take-off and landing.

Russian Offensive

On January 13, 2024, Russia is reported to have fired Kinzhal hypersonic missiles and drones at Ukrainian facilities, which produced 155 millimetre, 152mm and 125mm shells for the artillery. On Jan 18, 2024, Russia's defence ministry said in a statement that the Russian forces had taken control of a settlement in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region. On January 18, 2024, Russia launched 33 drones and two missiles at Ukraine overnight, with air defences destroying 22 drones, the Ukrainian military said. The main areas of attack were the south and north. On January 23, 2024, Russia unleashed a massive air strike on Kyiv, killing three people and wounding 42 and Kharkiv in the east, damaging a gas pipeline. On January 24, 2024, seven people were killed and around 70 more hurt in Russian missile attacks on Kyiv and Kharkiv, Ukraine's two largest cities, according to Ukrainian officials.

Geo-Strategic

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on January 16, 2024, that Ukraine's statehood could suffer an "irreparable blow" if the pattern of the war continued, and Russia would never be forced to abandon the gains it had made. Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, described peace plans backed by the West as "a road to nowhere" at the UN Security Council in New York.



Source: BBC News

COMMENTS

President Putin's statements about the war's course indicate that he has recently become increasingly confident and aggressive. The Russian economy will expand rapidly, with a GDP rise of 2.6 per cent in 2024, as per IMF.

With the temperature below freezing and forecasts predicting similar weather conditions until March, the frozen ground and rainy season have not allowed larger-scale ground operations. Both have been good at defensive posture rather than offensive.

The war's 1,500-kilometer front line has been largely static amid a second winter of fighting, thanks to modern weapons like drones, artillery, ground-based air defence, long-range anti-tank missiles and layered defence.

Ukraine's multi-layered system includes old Soviet systems such as the Buk, handheld devices like Stingers, more advanced systems like NASAMS and Iris-T, which can down cruise missiles, and Patriots, which can hit ground ballistic missiles.

Ukraine's mobile air defence teams offer cover to critical infrastructure and are placed along the possible flight paths of drones and missiles. Ukraine's ability to produce enough arms, especially drones, for its military will be central to its current strategy for defeating the Russians.

Ukraine has been hitting Russia's oil and gas infrastructure using long-range drones, and Russia, too, is hitting the energy infrastructure and weapon manufacturing facilities. Crimea will probably be the centre of Ukrainian combat in 2024, with minimal changes to the front lines on the mainland.

As both sides seek to replenish their weapons stockpiles, Moscow has shifted its defence industry to a war footing, and current military spending is more than twice that of prewar. Russia has been using deception and camouflage to adapt to the maturing Ukrainian long-range strike complex.

It has managed many artillery ordnances, and Ukraine is looking for more ammunition, especially for the Patriot's missile system. Ukraine will run out of money within months if aid from the U.S. or Europe doesn't come through.

European Union leaders are moving toward an agreement shortly to transfer some €50 billion (USD 54.1 billion) in aid to Ukraine.

Exclusive: China Presses Iran To Rein In Houthi Attacks In Red Sea, Sources Say

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/china-presses-iran-rein-houthi-attacks-red-sea-sources-say-2024-01-26/>

Chinese officials have asked their Iranian counterparts to help rein in attacks on ships in the Red Sea by the Iran-backed Houthis, or risk harming business relations with Beijing, four Iranian sources and a diplomat familiar with the matter said.

Background

In an effort to show allegiance to Hamas, the Houthis joined the Israel-Hamas war on October 31, 2023.[1] Their involvement began with direct attacks on Israel but soon shifted to attack on trade moving to and from Israel. This forced a coalition of countries led by the US under the name 'Operation Prosperity Guardian' (OPG) to commence protecting ships in the Red Sea against these attacks. The number and nature of attacks have increased since the first attack on November 19, 2023. By Christmas, 16 attacks had taken place[2] and by January 11, 2024 they had reached 27.[3] These attacks were primarily by drones and missiles which were destroyed by the US and UK fighters and warships. The Houthis began using anti-ship ballistic missiles on December 23, 2023[4] and on January 04, 2024, for the first time the Houthis used an Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) laden with explosives.[5] While there has been no reported casualty during these attacks, maritime trade passing the Suez has reduced with the average container vessels coming down to 5.8 from 15 in the first week of 2024.

Realising that these attacks will not reduce and that these attacks will need to be stopped even before they are affected, the US and the UK forces on January 11, 2024 with support from Australia, the Netherlands, Canada and Bahrain began attacking shore establishments of the Houthis using warplanes, warships, and submarines. Since then the US has been striking storage sites, radar capabilities and missiles on launch rails[6] as pre-emptive strikes to disallow the Houthis to launch an attack using missiles. These pre-emptive strikes have now become a near daily affair as seen in Table 1 and Fig. 1.[7] In retaliation, the Houthis have now started attacking the merchant ships of the US and UK as well.

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HOUTHII ATTACKS IN THE RED AND ARABIAN SEA

Table 1: Airstrikes by the coalition forces on Houthi land targets (Source: Author)

Date	Location	Attack by	Impact
11 Jan 24	28 locations	150 munitions and Tomahawk missiles	Five Houthi fighters were killed and six injured
12 Jan 24	Radar Site in Sanaa	The US	
14 Jan 24	Hodeida	The US and UK	
16 Jan 24	4 Houthi anti-ship ballistic missiles while being prepared	The US	
17 Jan 24	14 missiles across Houthi controlled areas	The US	
22 Jan 24	8 Houthi targets in vicinity of Sanaa airfield	The US and UK	



Figure 1: Houthi controlled areas attacked by the coalition (Source: Ecrusized [8])

Involvement of Nations

While the Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG) aims to bring together multiple countries that include the UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain under the US, not all nations have contributed to the operation with naval assets. The US and the UK have had their ships present in the region duly supported by Bahrain where the Fifth Fleet of the US Navy is stationed. They have also been responsible for strikes on Houthi land targets. Other than these two, Italy, Greece and Denmark [9] have provided naval assets while the Netherlands and Norway have provided staff officers to the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). [10]

Countries like France have only supported the action but have not deployed their naval assets. In addition, France, Italy and India have sent their naval assets independently to the region to strengthen maritime security in the Red Sea. Other countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have preferred to maintain a neutral stand to avoid upsetting the peace, stability and security of the region.

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HOUTHİ ATTACKS IN THE RED AND ARABIAN SEA

Though there are many nations that support the cause of Freedom of Navigation in the Red Sea, there are others that support the Houthis in their effort to attack the ships. It is important to mention that the Houthis are armed, funded and trained by Iran and form part of the anti-West, anti-Israel 'Axis of Resistance'.^[11] There are reports mentioning that Iranian intelligence ships help guide the Houthis to target the ships to be attacked in the Red Sea.^[12] In addition, Iran has enhanced their equipment provisioning for the Houthis which include drones, anti-ship cruise missiles, precision-strike ballistic missiles, and medium-range missiles. It is also believed that North Korea has also shipped weapons to the Houthis via Iran.^[13]

As the attacks unfold and grow by the day, countries like China have asked Iran to rein in the attacks in the Red Sea or risk business relations. Such a threat is important for Iran as China buys nearly 90% of the crude of Iran while other nations stay away due to sanctions from the US. However, the regional alliances and priorities that play an important role in the decisions of Iran preclude it from taking any action in this regard. It is believed that several other nations have also approached Iran to rein the Houthis,^[14] but with little success.

Impact

The attacks that began on ships of Israel have now spread to those of the US and UK. There have also been reports that Russian ships have been attacked due to mistaken identity.^[15] All this has created an environment of uncertainty for the merchant mariners and increased insurance charges by nearly 15-20% making operating ships on this route costly.^[16] Companies like BP, OOCL, Hapag-Lloyd, Mediterranean Shipping Co., Maersk and CMA CGM have either halted trade through the Red Sea or rerouted their ships round the Cape of Good Hope. This route is likely to add an additional cost of US\$ 1 million per ship towards cost of fuel, crew wages and insurance thereby increasing the cost of a 40 feet container to nearly double.^[17]

For the Israelis it means delays in receiving items and price hikes, for Egypt it means losing nearly US\$12 billion a year. With attacks continuing, the risk has increased to an extent that the US ships are turning back since even the presence of the US coalition forces has not deterred these attacks.^[18]

On the other hand, the UAE continues to use the Red Sea for their oil trade.^[19] In retaliation to the airstrikes by the US and UK, the Houthis have undertaken a drone strike on January 28, 2024 on a US troop base in north eastern Jordan that acts as a logistics, supply, and rear guard post for Al-Tanf base.^[20] This attack puts the US bases and other anti-Palestinian targets in the region at risk of being targeted by the Axis of Resistance and has the potential of escalating the existing tensions in the region to a full scale war with more stakeholders getting involved.^[21]

HOUTHİ ATTACKS IN THE RED AND ARABIAN SEA

Increased activities

With the focus of the world community on the Houthis and attacks in the Red Sea, the Somali pirates have also become active. The Indian Navy has accordingly been active and has thwarted three piracy attempts in the Arabian Sea. The first one on January 05, 2024 ensured the safety of 21 mariners including 15 Indians, from a Liberian-flagged carrier in the North Arabian Sea while the second on January 28, 2024 saved 17 Iranian nationals from the Iranian flagged Fishing Vessel (FV) Iman and then 19 Pakistani national from Fishing Vessel Al Naeemi on the same day.[22]

India as a maritime nation of the region has been part of the Combined Maritime Force (CMF) since April 2022 [23] and a part of CTF-150 as seen in Fig. 2. Accordingly, the Indian Navy has been actively patrolling and responding to any distress calls in this region both for piracy and attacks of the Houthis as seen during the December 23, 2023 attack on MV Chem Pluto. This has forced the Indian Navy to increase their presence by deploying ships, Dorniers, helicopters and P8I surveillance aircrafts.[24]

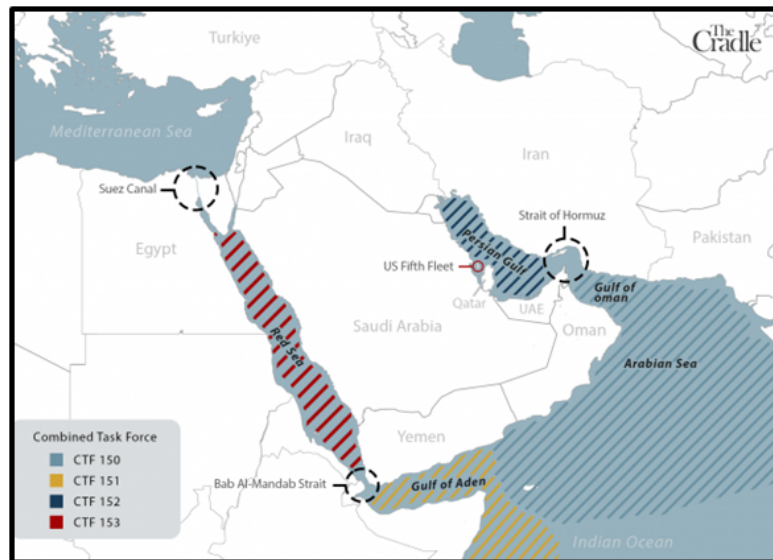


Figure 2: Areas of responsibility of CTFs [25]

The Future

The Red Sea theatre is heating up and the task for the coalition forces is only on the rise with having to address attacks and counter attacks on land installations along with protection of their assets as well as the merchant assets. Realising this limitation of the coalition, the Somali pirates have stepped in. What happens next is being watched closely by the world community with many nations involved directly or indirectly in the activities that unfold in the region. Till then, countries like India continue to patrol the seas to provide the much required safety and security to the civil traffic in the region.

HOUTHİ ATTACKS IN THE RED AND ARABIAN SEA

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China Is Quietly Expanding Its Land Grabs in the Himalayas

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/01/china-is-quietly-expanding-its-land-grabs-in-the-himalayas/>

As the U.S. government has spent ever more of its time in recent years preparing to respond to any potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan, Beijing has been busy slicing away parts of the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. Over the last few years, China has built massive infrastructure with hundreds of concrete structures, military posts, and administrative centers in the region of Beyul Khenpajong, some 12,000 feet in the northern Himalayan mountains. The so-called “hidden valley” is deemed sacred by Bhutanese, with the country’s royal family tracing its ancestral heritage to the area. China’s blatant land grab of Bhutanese territory is just its latest move to control areas of significance in Buddhist culture, exploit a far less resourceful neighbor, and challenge its regional rival India in the Himalayas. China’s expansion in the Beyul was first reported in Foreign Policy in 2021 by Robert Barnett, an expert on Tibet and the China-Bhutan border. Barnett wrote that while China had announced the settlement of a single village called Gyalaphug in the contested valley back in 2015, tens of miles of road and several key military buildings were in place in the Beyul and the neighboring Menchuma Valley by 2021.

COMMENTS

China has been using its open annexation of Bhutanese territory as a means of controlling Buddhist culturally significant areas, taking advantage of a neighbour that is significantly less resourceful, and challenging its regional foe, India, in the Himalayas. The Beyul expansion was initially covered by Robert Barnett, a specialist on Tibet and the China-Bhutan border, in Foreign Policy in 2021. Barnett stated that by 2021, tens of miles of roads and other important military structures had been constructed in the Beyul and the nearby Menchuma Valley, despite China having only proclaimed the colonisation of a small community named Gyalaphug in the disputed valley back in 2015. In this report, Barnett and his research team noted that in the Beyul and Menchuma Valley, there were numerous buildings, including 66 miles of new roads, a small hydropower plant, a communications facility, five military or police outposts, and a large signals tower. Those dispersed buildings now sit in fully developed township strips with hundreds of multistory buildings. Even though China and Bhutan agreed in 1998 to maintain the status quo until a permanent border settlement could be reached, the automobiles parked outside the structures give the appearance that the places are occupied.

The Tibetans are shocked that China bases its claims in Bhutan on the idea that these areas are a part of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The fact that China is advancing its imperialist goal in their name is offending them. It seems that China is carrying out its 1950s declaration that Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Arunachal are the five fingers and Tibet is the palm. China went on first to occupy Tibet, then they occupied five fingers, which is inclined to Mao Zedong's imperialist plans for Nepal, Bhutan, and three Indian states.

China had made Bhutan an offer in the 1990s to give up its claim in the northern regions in exchange for Doklam as part of a package deal, which was declined by Bhutan due to its close historical and economic links with India. (About 70% of Bhutan's imports are from India; the country's currency is fixed to the value of the Indian rupee; and India dominated Bhutan's foreign policy under a 1949 treaty that was later replaced by a far more liberal one. Presently there are strong indications that India's confidence in its strong ties to Bhutan is waning. Though experts believe New Delhi used the Indian media to suggest that Bhutan may have closed its eyes to Chinese building in Doklam, the government never explicitly questioned Bhutan's intentions. India is worried that Bhutan may open up to China as a result of its desire to stop Chinese intrusion and to grow its economy.

China's Leverage in Russia Deal Proves Putin Needs Xi More

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/markets/china-s-leverage-in-russia-deal-proves-putin-needs-xi-more/ar-BB1hq9mw?ocid=Peregrine>

Beijing is using its significant leverage over the Kremlin to strike a more favorable deal over a proposed gas pipeline that is vital to President Vladimir Putin's political stability, according to the Financial Times. Moscow's ambitious Power of Siberia-2 project, which will connect Russia's vast western gas fields in the Altai region to China, is facing an unexpected setback. Prime Minister Luvsannamsrain Oyun-Erdene of Mongolia, whose country's territory is central to the transborder infrastructure agreement, said the project's timeline could be in jeopardy.

COMMENTS

In President Xi Jinping of China has given his Russian counterpart significant political backing since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine almost two years ago, despite extensive Western sanctions and growing isolation from some of the major global economic powers.

But by relying on his northern neighbour, Putin has come to exhibit what many observers of the Kremlin have cautioned is a risky over-reliance on China's economy and, more significantly, its political leadership.

Moscow has made the Power of Siberia-2 pipeline, a portion of which would pass through Mongolia, a major priority for more than ten years. This importance has increased after Europe reduced its imports of Russian natural gas in 2022.

The pipeline is predicted to reroute 1.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas to northern China if it is built. Its anticipated export capacity is similar to that of the Nord Stream pipelines, which provided Germany with 1.9 trillion cubic feet of gas before they were damaged in 2022; the criminals are still at large.

Pakistan Conducts 'Precision Military Strikes' Against 'Terrorist Hideouts' In Iran's Sistan-Balochistan Province, 7 Killed

<https://www.millenniumpost.in/big-stories/pakistan-conducts-precision-military-strikes-against-terrorist-hideouts-in-irans-sistan-balochistan-province-7-killed-548656>

Pakistan on Thursday (18th Jan 2024) conducted "precision military strikes" against what it called "terrorist hideouts" in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province that killed 7 people, a day after Islamabad recalled its ambassador from Tehran and suspended all planned high-level bilateral visits in the wake of Iranian missile and drone strikes in Balochistan.

COMMENTS

Trouble does not seem to stop brewing in the western provinces of Pakistan as Iran launched a missile and drone attack in the Panjgur region in the southwest Balochistan province of the country on the night of 16th January 2024. Iran claimed to have struck the headquarters of Jaish al-Adl, a Sunni militant group that was formed in 2012 and is responsible for carrying out several attacks in Iran in the last few years, most recent being an attack on an Iranian police station in December 2023 that killed 11 police officers.

The previous day, Iran carried out similar strikes in Iraq and Syria against what it said were Israel's Mossad's centre in Irbil and locations of the Islamic State respectively. However, Pakistan claimed that the strike claimed civilian casualties (two children killed and three girls injured) rather than any militants and called the strike illegal and completely unacceptable, and in violation of Pakistan's sovereignty.[1] Pakistan launched a retaliatory strike using rockets, killer drones, loitering munitions and stand-off weapons on 18th January 2024 in the Sistan province of Iran on alleged hideouts of wanted Baloch militants belonging to the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) in an operation code-named 'Marg Bar Samachar', the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated.[2] Pakistan claimed to have killed ten terrorists all of whom were Pakistani nationals.

Pakistan also recalled its ambassador from Iran and suspended the return of Iran's envoy, who was visiting Iran at the time, from coming back to Islamabad. Both the countries stuck to their claims of having targeted militants in each other's territories, however, still continuing to call their relations 'brotherly'.

The actions of both the countries drew reactions from the nations around the world. While China called for restraint by the two countries and avoid further escalation, India acknowledged it to be a matter between Iran and Pakistan but also said that it understands "actions that countries take in their self-defence".

[1] Sharma, Muskaan. "Iran attacked Pak's Balochistan hours after top leaders met in Davos". NDTV World, January 17, 2024. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/iran-attacked-paks-balochistan-hours-after-top-leaders-met-in-davos-4878549>

[2] "Precision strikes destroyed BLA, BLF terror hideouts in Iran: ISPR". National Herald Tribune, January 19, 2024.

PAKISTAN/ SRI LANKA

The US criticised Iran's actions for violating the sovereignty of its three neighbours within a span of 48 hours in the name of counter-terrorism while supporting the same in the region. While the world held the apprehension of a fresh conflict germinating in the already burning region, the two countries decided to de-escalate and strengthen coordination to combat terrorism. The situation appears to have normalised as both the ambassadors return back to their respective assignments.



Source: Atlantic Council

The restive Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan by land area with an area of 3,47,190 square kilometres but is also the least populated. The province is an arid region made up of mountains and deserts and is part of the larger Balochistan region, the others being the Sistan-Baluchestan province of Iran and the southern areas of Afghanistan (Nimruz, Kandahar and Helmand provinces). The Balochistan province is majorly inhabited by the ethnic Baloch population. The other ethnicities include Pashtuns, Hazara, Gurjar, Saraiki and Sindhi. The area is rich in natural resources like gold, valuable stones, chromite, copper, coal, oil and natural gas. However, despite being so rich in natural resources, the population of the region lives in poverty, is mostly uneducated with very limited access to modern amenities as the area remains poorly invested and largely underdeveloped and most of the revenues from the province go to the other provinces of Pakistan. The neglect of the region and its people by the Pakistan government has been one of the prominent reasons for unrest there. China has shown strong intentions for mediation between Iran and Pakistan to ensure calm in the province as it has major interests because of its various China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects that are underway in Balochistan. One of the major CPEC projects is the expansion and upgradation of the Gwadar Port to is one of the major to accommodate docking by larger ships and construction of a floating Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) facility. Other CPEC projects in Balochistan include the Gwadar International airport, a 300 MW coal power plant, a water desalination plant and a 300-bed hospital in Gwadar city, the Gwadar East Bay Expressway to connect Gwadar port to the Makran Coastal Highway, 870 km of road in Balochistan alone as part of the Western alignment and a 660 MW coal power plant at Hub. The CPEC projects in Balochistan are already lagging with some of them not even started due to the unrest in the province. Over the last few years, China has lost several of its citizens working in Balochistan and the projects have been threatened by terrorist attacks. In 2020, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for an attack on the Pakistan Stock Exchange that it said was aimed at 'Chinese exploitative plans' in Balochistan.

In 2021, a bus with Chinese workers was struck by an explosion and nine Chinese citizens lost their lives. In April 2022, three Chinese teachers were killed in a suicide bomber attack in Karachi.[3] Most recently, in August 2023, the BLA attacked a convoy of 23 Chinese engineers involved in infrastructure projects in Gwadar. Though no Chinese life was lost, one got injured in the attack.[4] For the safety of its projects and citizens, China, too, wishes calm in Balochistan.

While Iran and Pakistan have not engaged their forces directly in the past, the relations between the two cannot be called devoid of tensions. Iran and Pakistan have often accused each other of hosting militants on their soil. Pakistan has used Sunni extremists in its attempts to control the restive Balochistan who have targeted the Shiite Iran with violent attacks and have harboured them in Pakistan. There have been other issues of contention like the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project which has failed to take off, Pakistan's erstwhile proximity to Iran's arch rival, the US, Iran's relations with India and Pakistan's close ties with Saudi Arabia, another of Iran's rivals.

The unprecedented missile attack by Iran, however, took Pakistan by surprise. Iran has suffered serious casualties in several recent militant attacks by the Islamic State. The Jaish al-Adl group attacked a police station in Iran in December 2023 killing 11 Iranian security personnel but Iran's complaints to Pakistan for satisfactorily responded too. Then came the Kerman bombing on 3rd January 2024 in which more than 90 people were killed and close to 300 got injured. Iran carried out punitive strikes on the locations of the alleged perpetrators in Iraq and Syria.

It was reported that Jaish al-Adl also played a role in the attack, therefore, Iran struck the group's location in Pakistan too. Pakistan had to retaliate to convey a message to Iran and other neighbours that sovereignty of Pakistan cannot be toyed with. However, Pakistan is not in a state to escalate further. It faces a political turmoil and an economic crisis. Terrorist attacks have become rampant.

The general elections are due to be held on 8th February in Pakistan. The relations with Afghanistan are at an all-time low with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) breathing down the neck. In such a livid scenario, Pakistan could ill afford to embroil itself into a conflict with Iran. But one needs to realise that these few days of tension between Iran and Pakistan brought the wider conflict around Gaza uncomfortably close to Indian borders.

[3] "Militant Attack In Pakistan's Balochistan Targets Chinese Engineers". Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 13, 2023. <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-balochistan-militants-attack-chinese-engineers/32546082.html>

[4] Sharma, Heena. "Pakistan: Convoy of 23 Chinese engineers attacked in Gwadar, 3 terrorists killed". WION, August 13, 2023. <https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/chinese-engineers-attacked-in-pakistans-gwadar-2-terrorists-killed-625047>

India Mulls an End to Myanmar Free Movement Border Zone

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/india-mulls-an-end-to-myanmar-free-movement-border-zone/>

India intends to scrap a free movement zone across its border with Myanmar after repatriating about 150 soldiers who crossed the frontier amid heavy fighting launched by the rebel Arakan Army in the north, where the junta is struggling to hold its ground. During a visit to the northeastern Indian state of Assam, Shah said that the government had “decided to fence the entire open India-Myanmar border,” adding that is “going to end this facility,” according to Times of India. The announcement followed the repatriation of 151 soldiers through an airlift organized by the Myanmar military out of the Mizoram Lawngtlai district, including nine who had been wounded, four critically.

COMMENTS

India and Myanmar share around 1,643 kilometres of border with the Northeastern Region of India which includes four states viz.- Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Out of such a long border, only 10 kilometres is fenced, situated in Manipur. Free movement was implemented in 2018, which allows tribes which significantly share ethnic connections to live on both sides of the border whereas, this area is largely uninhabited as it majorly has Himalayan mountains and dense forest. This movement permits people to travel up to 16 Kilometers into the border without any requirement of a visa with a stay of two weeks.[1]

India opted to close the Free Movement zone across the border with Myanmar due to significant security concerns that have existed since the civil conflict. In his speech in Assam, Amit Shah declared that the Modi government intended to discontinue the Free Movement Zone, which permits inhabitants of both nations to cross the border freely for up to ten miles without a visa. Indian Home Minister Amit Shah announced the decision to fence the border between India and Myanmar just like the border with Pakistan and Bangladesh while addressing the crowd in a passing out parade of Assam Police commandos in Guwahati during his visit to the northeastern state of Assam recently. The duration for completion of the fencing project has not been decided yet.

Since 2021 February, around 30,000 people have taken refuge in Mizoram due to the ongoing civil war between the junta and the rebel group. Along with refugees, nearly 416 soldiers fled from Myanmar and entered in Indian border after the conflict broke out between the Three Brotherhood Alliance (also known as Brotherhood Alliance, is an alliance comprising the Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and Ta'ang National Liberation Army created in June 2019) against the Burmese Junta in October. Fencing is an important step in reducing the soldier movement due to ethnic clashes across the border which is building insecurity in the northeastern region of the country.

[1]“Centre to Seal India-Myanmar Border Soon: Union HM Amit Shah Makes Big Announcement,” News Live, January 20, 2024, <https://newslivetv.com/centre-to-seal-india-myanmar-border-soon-union-hm-amit-shah-makes-big-announcement/>.

[2] Alisha Rahaman Sarka, “India to Fence Border with Myanmar and End Free Movement Agreement amid Civil War,” The Independent, January 21, 2024, <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/india-to-fence-border-with-myanmar-and-end-free-movement-agreement-amid-raging-civil-war/ar-BB1h4bXG>.

Navy To Monitor Chinese Ship In Indian Ocean Headed To Maldives

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indian-navy-to-monitor-chinese-ship-xiang-yang-hong-3-in-indian-ocean-maldives-mohamed-muizzu-101706098726466.html>

Mohamed Muizzu government announced that it received a diplomatic request from China for necessary clearances for the Chinese research vessel Xiang Yang Hong 3 to make a port call for rotation of personnel and replenishment and that the ship was coming to Male for operational turn around (OTR). The vessel is expected to arrive at Male port by 05 February 2024 and would not be conducting any research while in the Maldivian waters. The Indian Navy has said that it will monitor the Chinese surveillance ship in the Indian Ocean region to ensure that it does not carry out any exploration activity in the Maldivian Exclusive Economic Zone.

COMMENTS

India had already expressed its reservations over surveillance activity of the said Chinese spy ship to Sri Lanka and Maldives last year with renewed its concerns to Male after Mohamed Muizzu led government was sworn in. Based on Indian concerns Sri Lanka on December 22 announced that it will not allow any surveillance ship in its EEZ for the entire 2024.

China has been continuously developing its database through regular oceanic mapping and research surveys which are instrumental for submarine design and Anti-Submarine Warfare. While the Muizzu government has conveyed no deep sea exploration activity by the said Chinese ship, what remains to be seen is that whether the Chinese ship will stick to the rule of the Maldivian government or carry out surveillance in spite of the government stand. [1]



Source: Hindustan Times

The new Maldives government which was elected late last year has tilted strongly towards China and away from India. Chinese foreign ministry vice minister, Sun Haiyan, was in the Maldives for a two-day visit that ended yesterday. The visit came on the heels of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's five-day visit to China.

[1] Shishir Gupta on <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indian-navy-to-monitor-chinese-ship-xiang-yang-hong-3-in-indian-ocean-maldives-mohamed-muizzu-101706098726466.html> dated 24 Jan 2024.

[2] Paran Balakrishnan on <https://www.telegraphindia.com/entertainment/bangladeshi-actor-chanchal-chowdhury-stars-in-hoichois-new-web-series/cid/world/maldives-allows-chinese-ship-to-dock-but-says-no-to-conducting-any-reaserch-while-there/cid/1995867> dated 24 January 2024

Over 10 Indian Navy Warships Now Deployed In Arabian Sea; Aim To Deter Pirates, Drone Strikes

<https://www.news18.com/india/indian-navy-over-10-warships-arabian-sea-gulf-of-aden-piracy-attempts-drone-strikes-ins-chennai-missile-destroyer-8733011.html>

India has pressed on maintaining an undeterred presence in the Arabian Sea amid the escalating threat of piracy and drone attacks on commercial ships. The Indian Navy has now deployed over ten warships to intensify its maritime presence in the region starting from the North and central Arabian Sea to the Gulf of Aden to deter any piracy attempts and drone strikes.

Consistent ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) missions are being undertaken by the already deployed long-range P-8I maritime patrol aircraft and sea guardian drones.

The Navy had already deployed INS Kochi, INS Kolkata, INS Mormugao along with INS Chennai and multi-role frigates INS Talwar and INS Tarkash. Dornier and helicopters were also deployed for maritime surveillance and security purposes.

COMMENTS

Escalating number of attacks on merchant vessels in the Arabian Sea by the Houti rebels and other Pirate groups during the last few months as a follow up of the Palestine – Israel war remains a cause of concern for India being the net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region. The enhanced maritime security operations are being conducted by the nation independently and India has abstained from being a part of the US-led multinational 'Operation Prosperity Guardian' launched in the Red Sea in December. The aim of maintaining a dominant posture by the Indian Navy is to assist in stabilising the situation in the Arabian Sea, while promoting rule based order, freedom of movement and maritime security.



Source: News18

The Kenyan Government Is Set To Exit Its Government To Government (G2G) Deal That It Launched In April 2023

<https://www.africanews.com/2024/01/19/kenya-announces-an-end-to-g2g-oil-supply-deal/>

The G2G oil supply deal agreed between Kenya and three national oil exporters from the Gulf was launched by Kenya's president William Ruto last spring in a bid to stop the free fall of the Kenyan Shilling against foreign currencies. The deal marked a switch from an open tender system in which local companies bid to import oil each month. Since the scheme's launch the shilling has depreciated by over 20 percent against the US dollar, surpassing the historical low mark of 160 to the dollar.

COMMENTS

The Kenyan government's decision to exit oil export contracts with Gulf countries could impact India by potentially creating opportunities for increased oil trade between Kenya and India. As Kenya seeks new partners, India might benefit from enhanced energy cooperation and economic ties with Kenya. This could lead to more favourable oil prices and strengthened diplomatic relations between the two nations. Implications and Opportunities for India are as follows:

- **Diversification of Oil Sources:** The exit of Kenya from its existing contracts opens up opportunities for India to diversify its sources of oil. Kenya, with its emerging oil sector, could become an alternative supplier for India, helping reduce its dependence on a limited number of oil-exporting nations.
- **Strengthening Diplomatic Ties:** Engaging in new trade agreements with Kenya provides India with a chance to strengthen diplomatic ties in the African continent. A strategic partnership in the energy sector could pave the way for broader collaborations, including technology transfer, infrastructure development, and knowledge exchange.
- **Economic Cooperation:** India's engagement with Kenya could extend beyond the energy sector. Increased economic cooperation may involve joint ventures, investments, and trade partnerships that benefit both nations. This could lead to mutual economic growth and development.
- **Impact on Existing Gulf Relations:** Kenya's decision may strain its relations with the Gulf countries involved in the cancelled contracts. India, being an ally of both Kenya and several Gulf nations, might find itself in a delicate diplomatic position, requiring nuanced diplomacy to maintain strong ties with all parties involved.
- **Energy Security:** Partnering with Kenya for oil imports contributes to India's energy security by diversifying its sources. This move aligns with India's goal of securing a stable and diverse energy supply to meet its growing demand.
- **Investment Opportunities:** India could explore investment opportunities in Kenya's oil sector. This might involve infrastructure development, technology transfer, and capacity building, fostering a mutually beneficial economic relationship.
- **Geopolitical Influence:** Deepening ties with Kenya allows India to extend its geopolitical influence in the African region. As both nations collaborate on various fronts, India could become a key partner in Africa's economic and strategic landscape.
- **Enhanced Trade Relations:** The shift in oil contracts provides a platform for India and Kenya to enhance their bilateral trade relations. This could lead to increased exports and imports, contributing to the economic prosperity of both nations.

Philippines Plans Military Upgrades To Disputed South China Sea Outposts

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/15/philippines-to-upgrade-outposts-in-disputed-south-china-sea-for-its-troops>

The Philippines has said it plans to develop islands and reefs in the South China Sea that are the subject of contesting claims from China. The upgrades to the territorial features will seek to make them liveable for troops, Manila's military chief Romeo Brawner said on Monday. The announcement came amid simmering tensions between the Philippines and China.

COMMENTS

The complicated web of geopolitical forces in marine security is reflected in the Philippines' intentions to improve its military bases in the disputed South China Sea. These plans bear substantial consequences for the Indian Oceanic Region as a whole. As a result of its overlapping claims and disputed territory, the South China Sea has become a focal point of tensions in the region. It is necessary to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which these developments may resonate throughout the Indian Ocean to comprehend the ramifications of the military enhancements that the Philippines has implemented.

There is a possibility that the Philippines' decision to militarize disputed outposts in the South China Sea might influence the strategic equilibrium in the area. It is possible that the enhancement of military capabilities by governments could result in a rebalancing of power dynamics, which will push surrounding countries, especially those in the Indian Ocean, to reevaluate their own security postures. Because of this, the stability of the area may be affected, necessitating that countries in the Indian Oceanic area keep a careful eye on the shifting geopolitical realities and be prepared to adjust accordingly.

The changes that take place in the South China Sea have indirect but significant ramifications for India, which has a strong interest in preserving peace and stability in the Indian Ocean. India is allied with nations who share worries about China's aggression since it is a member of the Quad alliance, which consists of the United States of America, Japan, Australia, and India. To further strengthen its commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region, India may be prompted to further engage with other members of the Quad to address shared security issues because of the military enhancements that the Philippines has implemented.

Considering that the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean are both linked marine environments, it is possible for developments in one zone to have repercussions that flow into other regions. Maritime security and naval postures are becoming more important because of the Philippines recently implemented military enhancements. It is possible that India, with its expanding naval capabilities, could discover an enhanced urge to boost its maritime presence and cooperation in the Indian Ocean as a response to the changing security picture.

On the diplomatic front, the activities of the Philippines could result in an increase in the level of multilateral participation in the area. India is one of the nations that may participate in diplomatic efforts to resolve security problems and preserve international standards. These efforts may be undertaken by nations in the Indian Ocean area. The manifestation of this might take the form of increased collaborations, joint exercises, and collaborative projects with the intended purpose of supporting regional security and stability. The Indian Ocean is an essential economic lifeline, since it contains important maritime lanes that are used for the movement of energy and commerce. It is possible that any interruptions or conflicts that occur in the South China Sea might have indirect economic repercussions for the countries that are in the Indian Oceanic Region. Since India is a significant participant in the global economy, it is quite probable that it would diligently follow such changes to protect its economic interests.

In conclusion, the plans that the Philippines has for upgrading its military in the outposts that are inside the disputed waters of the South China Sea have a variety of ramifications for the Indian Oceanic Region. As these trends continue to unfold, India, along with other countries in the area, will be required to carefully navigate the changing geopolitical environment. They will need to place an emphasis on diplomatic solutions, encourage regional collaboration, and protect common interests in maritime security and stability.

China Rebuts Vietnam's Claims To Disputed South China Sea Islands

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-rebuts-vietnams-claims-disputed-south-china-sea-islands-2024-01-24/>

The Chinese foreign ministry on Wednesday said China's claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea were backed by "history" after Vietnam over the weekend repeated it had sufficient evidence to claim sovereignty over the islands. The Paracel and Spratly Islands, known as the Hoang Sa and Trong Sa islands in Vietnam, are in the South China Sea, a busy global maritime waterway almost all of which is claimed by China. Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Brunei are among other claimants.

COMMENTS

The continuing disagreement between China and Vietnam over claims to islands in the South China Sea has substantial ramifications for India, given the country's strategic interests and its location in the geopolitical sphere. Any changes in this region have the potential to have ramifications that echo across the Indo-Pacific region. The South China Sea has been a controversial area with overlapping claims from numerous governments. By analysing China's response to Vietnam's claims, one may get insights into the changing geopolitical scene as well as possible future repercussions for India.

A further illustration of the intricate power relations in the South China Sea is provided by China's refusal to acknowledge Vietnam's claims. The activities of China, which is a prominent player in the Indo-Pacific area, have the potential to affect the balance of power and the stability



Source: Reuters

of the region. Concerns about China's aggressiveness is shared by India, which is a member of the Quad alliance, which also includes the United States of America, Japan, Australia, and India. Any further escalation of tensions in the South China Sea might drive India to work more closely with other members of the Quad to preserve a rules-based international order.

Since the South China Sea is an essential waterway for international commerce, any conflicts that occur in the area have the potential to affect the security of the region. Since India is a significant participant in maritime security, it will vigilantly watch developments in order to guarantee the unrestricted and unobstructed sailing of sea routes. The escalation of tensions in the South China Sea may push India to reevaluate its naval posture and maritime security strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. Considering that India has significant economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region, disturbances in the South China Sea have the potential to have an effect on trade routes and commercial activity. Any tensions in the area might encourage India to diversify its trading routes and participate in diplomatic measures to guarantee the stability of critical marine passageways. The region is essential for the transit of energy for global commerce, and any tensions could push India to do so.

The disagreements that China has with other countries in the South China Sea may serve as an incentive for India to enhance its strategic ties with other countries that share similar values. To bolstering regional security, India has been working to strengthen its relationships with countries such as the United States of America, Japan, Australia, and Southeast Asian states. As governments seek collective answers to geopolitical difficulties, the continuation of tensions in the South China Sea may further strengthen the relationships that have been established already. It is expected that India would place an emphasis on diplomatic remedies to crises since it is a supporter of multilateralism and a consistent adherent to international rules. It is possible that India would participate in diplomatic efforts within international forums to settle the issues and maintain the norms of international law as a result of the tensions that have arisen in the South China Sea. There is a possibility that the developing situation in the South China Sea will influence India's military posture and military readiness. It is possible that India would reevaluate its defence strategy and naval capabilities to consider the need to protect its maritime interests. This will ensure that India is able to effectively meet any potential issues that may arise because of the disputed seas. In conclusion, China's refutation of Vietnam's claims in the South China Sea has ramifications for India that are numerous and complex. The constantly shifting circumstances highlight the linked nature of the geopolitical events taking place in the Indo-Pacific region. Increasing the importance of diplomatic solutions, building strategic relationships, and preserving the security and stability of the maritime domain are all possible strategies that India will use in order to successfully manage these challenges. A thorough examination of India's national interests, regional security imperatives, and adherence to international standards will serve as the guiding principle for India's reaction as the situation continues to develop.

India, France Sign Pact To Jointly Develop, Launch Military Satellites

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indiafrance-to-mutually-launch-military-satellites-101706406900408.html>

India and France have signed an ambitious and unprecedented Defence Space Agreement that could see the two countries launch military satellites with both offensive and defensive capabilities, people familiar with the matter said. The deal, not publicised or spoken of, was quietly signed by French Defence Minister Sebastien Locornu and India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on January 26, even as French President Emmanuel Macron was attending the "At Home" Republic Day reception at Rashtrapati Bhawan along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

COMMENTS

France and India have inked a bold and historic Defence Space Agreement that may lead to the launch of military satellites with both offensive and defensive capabilities. Recalling over sixty years of collaboration in space exploration the leaders reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing space collaboration, benefiting not only their countries but also humanity and the planet. This entails working together on the design, production, and launch of payloads and satellites as well as investigating novel technologies for launch vehicles especially those that are reusable and establishing links between users and start-ups in both countries. Positive feedback was given to the memorandum of understanding between NSIL and Arianespace, which focuses on creating a long-term collaboration for satellite launch missions. Both President Macron and Prime Minister Modi gave their consent for the "Letter of Intent on Defence Space Cooperation" to be signed.

Despite the Modi administration maintaining discretion regarding the defense space collaboration with France, India's longest-standing civil space ally, the Letter of Intent sets the stage for a joint endeavor between the space agencies of the two nations. This collaboration aims to develop and deploy military satellites geared towards safeguarding national security. These satellites are designed not only to shield India's space assets in critical situations but also to monitor the activities of potential adversaries.

Apart from this, France has expressed readiness to assist India in creating state-of-the-art defense equipment, including advanced fighter jet engines, nuclear submarines, and underwater unmanned vehicles, with a focus on local production. The defense industrial strategy unveiled by the leaders of both nations aims to enhance India's self-sufficiency over the long term and establish a robust industrial foundation within the country. This initiative is expected to generate employment opportunities and diminish India's reliance on international imports. Additionally, the two countries have agreed to produce these defense items in India for export to other nations.

In this context, the significance of space as a critical domain for national security cannot be overstated. The India-France Defence Space Agreement could be seen as a continuation of this shift, potentially raising concerns for China regarding the balance of power in space.

North Korea's Rejection of Unification Emboldened by Russia Ties

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/N-Korea-at-crossroads/North-Korea-s-rejection-of-unification-emboldened-by-Russia-ties>

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's declaration that he is abandoning unification with South Korea, after more than 50 years of alternating progress and stagnation, hints at greater confidence in Pyongyang's military capabilities -- with apparent aid from Russia. South Korean media recently took note of a change in the North: Weather forecasts on Pyongyang's state-run Korean Central Television switched from a map that highlighted the entire Korean Peninsula to one that only marked the northern half. This was around the same time that Kim declared in a [January speech](#) that North Korea should "completely eliminate such concepts as 'reunification,' 'reconciliation' and 'fellow countrymen' from the national history of our republic."

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The Korean Peninsula is presently characterized by waves of uncertainty and looming tensions on the use of nuclear weapons. The Kim Jong Un's regime has abandoned the dream of the Korean re-unification signaling tensions across the peninsula and stakeholders involved. The dismissal of re-unification plans coincides with North Korea testing its 2nd cruise missile Pulhwasal-3-31 earlier last week into the Yellow Sea as reported by South Korean and Japanese military. [1] The North Korean state media reported that the development of military capabilities undertaken by the Kim regime is hinted towards building a strong naval presence that could counter the US presence in the region. Additionally, the country has also successfully tested underwater nuclear weapon systems [2] as a staunch counter to the trilateral naval drill that was conducted by the US, South Korea and Japan. [3] North Korea reported that the naval drill was direct threat to the security of the country justifying the testing of Haeil-5-23 in the East Sea of Korea. However, the capabilities of the underwater systems are yet to be ascertained.

The cordial relations being shared by Russia and North Korea since President's Putin's visit to Pyongyang last year has certainly pushed the peninsula towards a cold war dilemma. Though the characteristics of the Russia-North Korea relationship can be narrowed down to exchange of technologies and military aid, it has certainly ushered and emboldened cold war mentality politics in the peninsula and the region.

[1] Wright, B. G. (2024, January 29). North Korea fires cruise missiles off east coast, Seoul Reports. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68120728>

[2] N Korea Tests Underwater Nuclear Weapon System After US, S Korea Drills. (n.d.). NDTV.com. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/n-korea-tests-underwater-nuclear-weapon-system-after-us-s-korea-drills-4890329>

[3] Tong-Hyung, K. (2024, January 17). US, South Korea and Japan Conduct Naval Drills. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/us-south-korea-japan-naval-exercise-north-korea-e04d3adef36799f6f31b3ba2643ff2fe#:~:text=South%20Korea's%20Joint%20Chiefs%20of%20Staff%20said%20the%20trilateral%20naval,usually%20involve%20around%20five%20vessels>.

The decision of discarding re-unification will carry serious implications for the US security architecture in the region, particularly as public opinion is strongly supporting Seoul's decision to develop its own nuclear capabilities. South Korea is particularly experiencing the trap of abandonment or entrapment as defined by Glenn Snyders in 'The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics'. [4] In both bipolar and multipolar systems, alliance relations are examined through the lens of the "security dilemma." The conundrum entails deciding whether to support allies or not, as well as balancing anxieties of being abandoned and captured. It engages with the adversary security problem, when one must decide between being firm and being accommodative with the adversary.

North Korea's decision will also shape China's and Japan's policies towards the region. Japan's security worries are heightened by North Korea's shift in goals. The US must adjust to this new diplomatic environment given its significant military presence in the area and its role as a major actor in the North Korean denuclearization negotiations. Washington would have to reconsider how it approaches talks with North Korea and work closely with allies in the region. India has long remained away from the spiraling tensions in the Korean peninsula.

However, interactions between Seoul and New Delhi have revived with an aim to collaborate on issues related to technology and military capabilities. Both South Korea and India, as middle power countries share the vision for an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. The growing tensions between the North and South Korea, may carry significant takeaways for India, especially when New Delhi shares borders with two nuclear armed adversaries. The relation shared between Pakistan and China with North Korea becomes vital in assessing the present developments. Though North Korea's actions appear rhetorical, these escalations hint towards changing dynamics in the region and question power dynamics and military tensions between the stakeholders. This demands a consensual approach to mitigate any threat that could compromise the peace and stability in the region.



Source: StratFor

[4] Snyder GH. The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics. World Politics. 1984;36(4):461-495. doi:10.2307/2010183

India Signs An Agreement To Acquire Five Lithium Mines In Argentina

https://www.business-standard.com/industry/news/india-signs-an-agreement-to-acquires-five-lithium-mines-in-argentina-124011500866_1.html

The Centre on 15th January signed an agreement to acquire five lithium brine blocks for exploration and development in Argentina. The agreement was signed between Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) and Catamarca Minera Y Energética Sociedad Del Estado (CAMYEN), a state-owned mining and energy company in the Argentine province of Catamarca. This is the first ever lithium exploration and mining project by a state-owned company.

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"Following the discovery, exploitation rights for commercial production will be granted. The agreement will enable India to enhance its lithium supplies and foster the growth of both countries' lithium mining and downstream sectors. Additionally, it will support the diversification of the supply chain for critical materials, contributing to the attainment of Global Net Zero goals," stated Prahlad Joshi, the Minister of Coal and Mines, following the signing of the agreement.

KABIL has secured exploration and exclusivity rights under the recent agreement, allowing the evaluation, prospecting, and exploration of lithium minerals. Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL) is a collaborative venture formed with the involvement of three Central Public Sector Enterprises: National Aluminium Company Ltd. (NALCO), Hindustan Copper Ltd. (HCL), and Mineral Exploration Company Ltd. (MECL). This agreement not only propels India's efforts to secure a lithium supply but also provides essential technical and operational know-how for the exploration, exploitation, and extraction of brine-type lithium. Argentina, according to the Lithium Statistics and Information 2023 report by the United States Geological Survey, possesses 20% of the world's 98 million tonnes of lithium resources, positioning it as the second-largest holder after Bolivia. [1]

As part of the "Lithium Triangle" alongside Chile and Bolivia, Argentina, with the second-largest lithium resources globally, the third-largest lithium reserves, and the fourth-largest production, plays a significant role. India's discussions with Argentina are focused on leveraging its salt-lake lithium, offering a cost-effective extraction method compared to hard-rock mining, making it commercially attractive and a substantial contributor to production. KABIL is gearing up to establish a branch office in Catamarca, Argentina, with an estimated project cost of about 200 crores. This marks India's second foreign partnership for critical minerals sourcing, following a memorandum of understanding signed with Australia's Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO) in 2022.

[1] Dutta, Sanjay. "Eye on China, India Inks First Overseas Lithium Mining Deal for Five Blocks in Argentina." The Times of India, January 15, 2024. <https://m.timesofindia.com/india/eye-on-china-india-inks-first-overseas-lithium-mining-deal-for-five-blocks-in-argentina/articleshow/106874549.cms>.



Source: Business Standard

The objective of the deal is to promote sustainable development in the mining sector, ensuring a resilient and diversified supply chain for critical and strategic minerals essential for various industries.

India currently meets its lithium demand through 100% imports, with lithium imports reaching approximately \$3 billion (around ₹24,900 crore) in FY23, a 58% increase from FY22, as per Ministry of Commerce and Industry data. Over 95% of these imports are sourced from China and Hong Kong.[2] The exploration and development agreement for five lithium blocks aligns with India's goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 and positioning itself as a manufacturing hub for electric vehicles.

Lithium, extensively used in various applications, particularly in lithium-ion batteries, powers devices such as smartphones, laptops, electric vehicles, and energy storage systems for renewable energy sources. It is also utilized in medical treatments, ceramics, and aerospace technology.

India's efforts in securing lithium blocks in Argentina contribute to its quest for self-reliance in meeting clean energy demands. In November 2023, India initiated its first critical minerals auction, making two lithium blocks in Jammu and Kashmir and Chhattisgarh available for bidding. The agreement is particularly noteworthy in light of India's recent entry into the US-led Mineral Security Partnership (MSP), aimed at accelerating the development of diverse and sustainable critical energy minerals supply chains globally.

[2] Anuradha. "India to Develop Five Lithium Blocks in Argentina with an Estimated Cost of INR 200 Crores • EVreporter." EVreporter, January 16, 2024. <https://evreporter.com/india-to-develop-five-lithium-blocks-in-argentina/>.