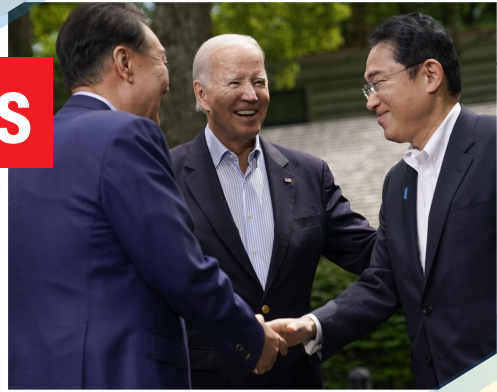


04 September | 2023

Indo-Pacific Insights

cgs Centre for
Governance Studies



XV BRICS SUMMIT BRICS LEADERS RETREAT

BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism
22 AUGUST 2023, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

August 21

Australian FM visits Vietnam

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong arrived in Vietnam for a three-day visit during which she co-hosted the fifth Australia-Vietnam Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AVFMM) with her Vietnamese counterpart, Bui Thanh Son. They agreed to further implement high-level agreements, including elevating their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Amid strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, their partnership is expected to continue advocating for a rules-based international order, expanding cooperation in climate change and energy transition, and jointly defending the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the South China Sea.

Australia's Missile Expansion

Australia announced plans to buy 200 Tomahawk ship-borne cruise missiles, with a range of about 1,500 km.

CAN THE CAMP DAVID TRILATERAL SUMMIT 2023 RESHAPE THE INDO-PACIFIC?

Shamsuddoza Sajen

The Camp David Trilateral Summit of 2023, which brought together leaders from the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK), marks a historic moment in international diplomacy with significant implications for the Indo-Pacific region. This article analyzes the key aspects of the summit and its potential to reshape the Indo-Pacific.

August 22

BRICS Expands

The 15th BRICS Summit took place in South Africa from August 22 to August 24, marking a significant development as BRICS extended invitations to six new nations: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE. Currently, the BRICS nations collectively represent over 42% of the

global population, cover 26% of the Earth's land area, contribute to 26% of the global GDP, and account for 18% of worldwide trade. With this expansion, these proportions are set to increase substantially: their share of the world's land area will rise to 32%, their combined population will reach 47%, their economic aggregate will expand to 29%, and their total trade in goods will encompass 21% of global totals.

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August 22

Thaksin Returns



Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra returned to Thailand after a 15-year exile. The 74-year-old, who faces criminal charges, was promptly imprisoned but is anticipated to secure a release via a Royal Pardon soon. His arrival coincided with significant political developments, fueling speculations of a possible agreement with the military. Thailand's new Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, hails from the Pheu Thai party, founded by Mr. Thaksin. In the recent election, Pheu Thai secured second place, while the winning party, the Move Forward Party, saw its candidate barred from taking office by the conservative establishment.

August 23

Hasina meets Xi



President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina discussed enhancing high-quality Belt and Road cooperation between China and Bangladesh. They emphasized the importance of economic complementarity and agreed to bolster collaboration in various sectors, including infrastructure, information technology, new energy, and agriculture. The meeting was held at the Hotel Hilton Sandton in Johannesburg, South Africa, on the sidelines of the 15th BRICS Summit.

August 24

China-Japan Row Over Fukushima Wastewater Release



On August 24, Japan initiated the release of treated but still radioactive wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean. China's government strongly criticized the move, demanding an immediate halt to the discharge. China immediately banned imports of Japanese seafood in response. Harassment campaigns, including phone calls and stone throwing, have targeted Japanese institutions in China, demanding Japan's embassy to express "regret" and "worry" about the trend.

Japan's Prime Minister Kishida Fumio invited China to engage in a "joint scientific discussion" on the release but has not received a positive response from China.

August 29

Territorial Tensions Escalate Ahead of G20 Summit



India has lodged a strong protest against a new Chinese map that lays claim to Indian territory just before the Group of 20 summit in New Delhi. Meanwhile, according to media reports, it is likely that Chinese President Xi Jinping will not attend the Summit. The disputed boundary has been a longstanding issue, leading to clashes and fatalities in recent years. While both sides have expressed a desire to de-escalate tensions during the BRICS Summit of 2023, this latest development further strains their relations.

Japan, U.S., Australia Philippines Joint Naval Drills

Japan, the United States, Australia, and the Philippines conducted joint naval exercises in the South China Sea in response to China's interference with Manila's supply activities at military sites in the area. The training involved Japan's Izumo helicopter carrier and Samidare destroyer, U.S. Navy's Mobile, Australia's Canberra assault ship, frigate Anzac, F-35A fighter jets, and the Philippine Navy's Davao Del Sur landing ship. The exercise aimed to enhance collaboration in realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific, countering China's growing influence in the region.

September 1

Singapore Elects New President



Singapore held its sixth presidential election, with three independent candidates: Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Ng Kok Song, and Tan Kin Lian. Incumbent president Halimah Yacob chose not to run. Tharman won in a historic landslide, securing 70.40% of the votes and becoming the first non-Chinese directly elected president in a contested election in Singapore's history.

September 2

India Launches Rocket to Study the Sun

India is continuing its space exploration by sending a rocket called Aditya-L1 to study the sun. This comes shortly after their successful mission to the moon. The rocket, carrying special tools, started its four-month journey, leaving a trail of smoke and fire as it took off. It's important to note that India is now the fourth country to successfully land on the moon.

CAN THE CAMP DAVID TRILATERAL SUMMIT 2023 RESHAPE THE INDO-PACIFIC?

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Historical context



The summit takes place at a time when U.S.-China relations have grown increasingly contentious, and North Korea's nuclear capabilities continue to pose a regional threat. In response, the United States, Japan, and the ROK have sought to strengthen their trilateral security cooperation, a development with historical roots.

During the Cold War, the United States recognized the strategic value of trilateral cooperation among Japan, South Korea, and itself in defense and deterrence. In the post-Cold War era, this alliance also became essential for supporting the U.S.-led liberal international order.

Two significant historical moments in this trilateral relationship are worth noting. The first, in 1965, saw the United States broker the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea, leading to economic assistance and technological cooperation that played a pivotal role in South Korea's economic development. The second, less positive, moment occurred in 2022 when Japan-South Korea relations hit a low point, marked by asset disputes and strained diplomatic ties.

The Camp David Summit in 2023 represents a third historic moment in this relationship, signaling a renewed commitment to cooperation. The summit's outcomes are notable, particularly the institutionalization of high-level meetings, the establishment of trilateral military exercises, and agreements on supply chains, combatting disinformation, and development assistance.

The Significance of the Camp David Summit for the Indo-Pacific

The summit firmly aligns with the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," and underscores the principle that a challenge to the security of one of three countries affects the security of all. This recognition is a foundational understanding highlighted in the summit's statements. This is a significant step in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific in several key ways:

Expanding the scope of the U.S.-ROK alliance

Historically the U.S.-ROK alliance has predominantly focused on addressing North Korean threats. With the trilateral framework expanding its scope to encompass the Indo-Pacific, the alliance is evolving to tackle broader regional challenges, including those related to security, economics, and diplomacy. This expansion enhances the U.S.-ROK partnership's significance in the region beyond the Korean Peninsula.

Elevated Security Cooperation

While there are mutual defense treaties between the United States and Seoul and between the United States and Tokyo, no such legal arrangement exists between Tokyo and Seoul. The trilateral commitment to consult on security matters elevates cooperation to a higher level and creates a platform for strengthening bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea. The trilateral security cooperation will also include enhancing defense exercises, sharing real-time missile warning data, and coordinating responses to regional

challenges and provocations. These measures will contribute to a more robust and coordinated security posture in the Indo-Pacific, dissuading potential aggressors.

Countering China's Economic Influence

The summit's acknowledgment of China's increasing influence in the military and economic domains emphasizes the determination of the three countries to counter it.

The summit's mention of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, for example, signals a united stance on this sensitive issue. While the tone is measured, the reaffirmation of their commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes and avoidance of unilateral actions impacting the status quo is a significant message to Beijing.

They are also actively working to offer alternatives to China's economic influence and safeguarding the economic interests of regional nations.

For example, the memorandum of understanding among the development finance institutions of the United States, Japan, and the ROK signifies their intent to mobilize financing for quality infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific that can be a counterweight to China's BRI at land and sea. This initiative aligns with broader efforts to improve infrastructure, including information and communications technology (ICT), promote carbon neutrality, and strengthen resilient supply chains.

Bolstering Existing Regional Architectures:

The summit's focus on strengthening established regional structures, such as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and the Pacific Islands Forum, demonstrates a renewed commitment to multilateralism, which waned during the Trump era. The Summit has also established a trilateral maritime mechanism focused on capacity building in Southeast Asia and Pacific Island countries. It underscores the importance of enhancing maritime law enforcement and domain awareness, which are crucial elements for maintaining maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

Challenges and Future Prospects

While the Camp David Summit holds great potential for rapprochement between South Korea and Japan, historical and nationalistic disputes between them remain unresolved, posing challenges to the durability of their relations. Furthermore, concerns about potential changes in U.S. foreign policy in the future could impact the trilateral partnership, as seen in the shift during the Trump era.

Additionally, China and North Korea have criticized the trilateral alliance's emergence, potentially leading to regional power shifts and challenges to the resolve of the three countries.

As the trilateral framework interacts with other regional minilaterals, such as the Quad, ensuring synergy among these cooperative agendas will be critical to advancing their shared goals in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

In summary, the implications of the Camp David Trilateral Summit for the Indo-Pacific are significant and multifaceted. They encompass not only security concerns but also economic, diplomatic, and regional cooperation aspects. The commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, coupled with coordinated efforts to address regional challenges, positions the United States, Japan, and the ROK as key players in shaping the future of this vital and dynamic region. Their actions will undoubtedly influence the course of events in the Indo-Pacific for years to come, impacting regional stability, security, and prosperity.



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