

# Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



## A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

Key topics included Taiwan, the South China Sea, and China's role in fentanyl production. Despite no new agreements on contentious issues, progress was made in military communications. Sullivan's visit underscores ongoing efforts to manage U.S.-China relations amid escalating global tensions and upcoming U.S. elections.

### August 30

#### Pakistan Launches Operations in Balochistan After Deadly Insurgent Attacks

Pakistan's military has initiated intelligence-based operations in Balochistan following insurgent attacks that killed over 50 people this week. The army reported killing five insurgents and wounding three others in three separate operations, with vows to continue until all involved are brought to justice. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for one of the deadliest attacks in years, targeting civil and military sites in a bid for secession. Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif stated the attacks were aimed at undermining the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key element of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Beijing has condemned the violence.

#### Pacific Islands Forum Endorses Plan to Boost Regional Police Forces

The Pacific Islands Forum has approved a plan to enhance police numbers among its members, reducing reliance on external forces during crises.

### August 29

#### U.S.-China Talks Aim to Ease Tensions Ahead of U.S. Election



U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan concluded a three-day visit to Beijing with a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. During their discussions, Xi expressed Beijing's commitment to a stable relationship with Washington, while Sullivan reaffirmed U.S. President Joe Biden's dedication to managing relations to avoid conflict.

This initiative, backed by Solomon Islands and funded by Australia, aims to establish a regional policing unit for major incidents. Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown emphasized the need for regional collaboration rather than competition. Analysts view the move as Australia's strategy to counter China's growing police presence in the region. Solomon Islands Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele and Tonga's Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni supported the plan, which also includes a fact-finding mission to New Caledonia amid ongoing unrest.

## August 31

### Philippines and China Accuse Each Other of Coast Guard Vessel Ramming in South China Sea

The Philippines and China exchanged accusations of intentionally ramming coast guard vessels near the Sabina Shoal, marking their fifth maritime confrontation in a month. Beijing's expansive claims over the South China Sea, contested by the Philippines and other nations, were deemed baseless by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016, a ruling China rejects. Philippine Coast Guard spokesperson Jay Tarriela reported that China Coast Guard vessel 5205 rammed the Philippine vessel Teresa Magbanua, causing damage but no injuries. China's Liu Dejun claimed the Philippine vessel deliberately rammed a Chinese ship and demanded withdrawal.

## September 1

### Tens of Thousands in Tasmania Without Power After Severe Storms

Tens of thousands of people in Tasmania were left without power following a severe cold front that brought damaging winds and heavy rains. Tasnetworks reported that around 30,000 customers were affected. The cold front has moved on, but bands of showers and thunderstorms continue to threaten with damaging winds. Tasmania's emergency management minister, Felix Ellis, noted significant damage to properties and infrastructure, with a potentially high repair cost. Flood warnings are in effect, raising concerns about isolation for several days. Emergency services have received 330 assistance requests, and another cold front is expected on Sunday night.

## September 2

### Putin Arrives in Mongolia Amid Gas Pipeline Talks and ICC Warrant Controversy



Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Mongolia for a state visit, coinciding with ongoing discussions about the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline. The pipeline, which aims to transport 50 billion cubic metres of natural gas annually from Russia's Yamal region to China via Mongolia, is a key part of Russia's strategy to offset lost European gas sales due to the Ukraine conflict. Putin will meet with Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh on Tuesday. Ukraine has urged Mongolia to arrest Putin under an International Criminal Court warrant for war crimes, but the Kremlin dismisses the claim as politically motivated.

### Myanmar to Conduct Census in October Amid Ongoing Conflict and Election Plans

Myanmar's military government announced that a nationwide census will be conducted from October 1-15 to prepare for a general election next year. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing stated that the census data will help create accurate voter lists necessary for a fair election. However, the planned election is widely criticised as a sham, with many opposition parties, including the disbanded National League for Democracy (NLD), not participating. Myanmar remains in turmoil following the February 2021 coup, with armed resistance and ethnic minority armies challenging the military's control over much of the country.

## September 3

### Iran Summons Australian Ambassador Over LGBTQ+ Post

Iran summoned Australia's ambassador, Ian McConville, over an Instagram post by the Australian embassy in Tehran celebrating "Wear it Purple Day," which promotes LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. Iranian state media criticized the post for "promoting homosexuality." The semi-official ILNA news agency quoted McConville as stating that the post did not intend to insult Iranian people or their values. The post remains on the embassy's Instagram account. In 2022, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei condemned homosexuality as "moral depravity." While Western rights groups accuse Iran of repressing sexual freedoms, Tehran dismisses the criticism as a misunderstanding of its Islamic legal principles.

## September 4

### Bangladesh Struggles with New Rohingya Influx Amid Escalating Myanmar Conflict

About 8,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh in recent months due to escalating violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state, according to Bangladeshi officials. Fighting between Myanmar's junta and the Arakan Army has intensified, worsening the humanitarian crisis. Bangladeshi authorities, already hosting over a million Rohingya, say they are unable to accommodate more refugees.

De facto foreign minister Mohammad Touhid Hossain announced a cabinet discussion to address the crisis but emphasized limited capacity. Meanwhile, new arrivals plead for shelter and aid. Bangladesh has urged India and other nations to step up and called for international pressure on Myanmar's Arakan Army.

## Taiwan Monitors Chinese Landing Drills Near Taiwan Strait

Taiwan's defence ministry announced that it is closely monitoring Chinese landing drills in Fujian province, opposite Taiwan across the Taiwan Strait. The drills involve Chinese combat aircraft, helicopters, drones, amphibious ships, and freighters loaded with ground troops conducting "joint landing exercises" around Dacheng Bay. China, which claims Taiwan as its territory, has intensified military activities near the island, which Taipei firmly opposes. The ministry noted similar drills have occurred in September in previous years but reiterated that China lacks the capability for a full-scale invasion. The latest exercises follow large-scale war games in May after Taiwan's new president took office.

## September 5

### Malaysia to Continue South China Sea Oil Exploration Despite China's Objections

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced that Malaysia will not halt its oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea, despite China's claims of territorial infringement. Speaking from Russia, Anwar emphasized that Malaysia's activities are within its waters and not intended as provocation. China has protested Malaysia's exploration in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), but Anwar maintained that Malaysia is operating within its rights under international law. Anwar affirmed that while Malaysia is open to discussions with China, it will not stop its operations. The South China Sea remains a contested area with overlapping claims by several countries.

### India and Singapore Sign Semiconductors Partnership Agreement



India and Singapore signed an agreement to enhance cooperation in the semiconductor sector, boosting Singapore's role in Indian supply chains. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Singapore.

The partnership aims to leverage complementary strengths, focusing on supply chain resilience, ecosystem development, and workforce training. Singapore, accounting for 11% of the global semiconductor market, will collaborate with India, which plans to expand its semiconductor market to \$63 billion by 2026. Three additional agreements on digital technologies, education, and healthcare were also signed during Modi's visit, highlighting deeper bilateral cooperation.

## September 6

### Super Typhoon Yagi Hits China's Hainan, Causes Widespread Chaos

Super Typhoon Yagi, Asia's strongest storm this year, struck China's Hainan province causing widespread power outages and paralyzing the popular tourist destination. With winds reaching 234 km/h (145 mph), Yagi is the second-most powerful storm of 2024, after Atlantic Hurricane Beryl. It made landfall in Wenchang, triggering outages that affected 830,000 households. A 7,000-member emergency team is working to restore power. Yagi's arrival prompted flight cancellations, business closures, and warnings for residents to stay indoors. The storm, which has already affected Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangdong, is expected to impact Vietnam and Laos next.

### Thailand's Youngest PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra Sworn In Amid Political Unrest



Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn swore in Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and her 35-member cabinet in Bangkok, marking a new chapter for the country after recent political turmoil. At 38, Paetongtarn is Thailand's youngest prime minister and the second woman to hold the position. She leads a coalition government dominated by her Pheu Thai party. The ceremony at Dusit Palace saw King Vajiralongkorn express hopes for the cabinet's commitment to national service. As the daughter of former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, Paetongtarn faces significant challenges, including an unstable economy and the legacy of her family's divisive political history.

## September 7

### Fresh Ethnic Violence Erupts in Manipur, Leaving Six Dead



Fresh violence between Manipur's Meitei and Kuki communities killed six people, including a civilian. The conflict stems from a court ruling to extend special benefits to the Meiteis, angering the tribal Kukis. Over 225 people have died, and 60,000 have been displaced since the clashes began last year. Authorities reported escalating violence this week, with drones allegedly used by Kuki militants to drop explosives, a claim denied by Kuki groups. Manipur has ordered schools shut and deployed security forces to control the situation as fighting continues in the divided state, with each community holding separate territories.

## September 8

### Yunus Urges Faster Rohingya Resettlement Amid Escalating Myanmar Crisis

Bangladesh's interim government head, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, called for expedited third-country resettlement of Rohingya refugees amidst renewed violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Around 8,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh recently, joining over a million already in overcrowded camps. Yunus, in a meeting with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), emphasized that resettlement should be "easy, regular, and smooth." The United States has pledged to accept thousands, yet the process remains slow. Bangladesh, unable to accommodate more refugees, urges international intervention and pressure on Myanmar's Arakan Army to halt attacks on Rohingya communities.

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