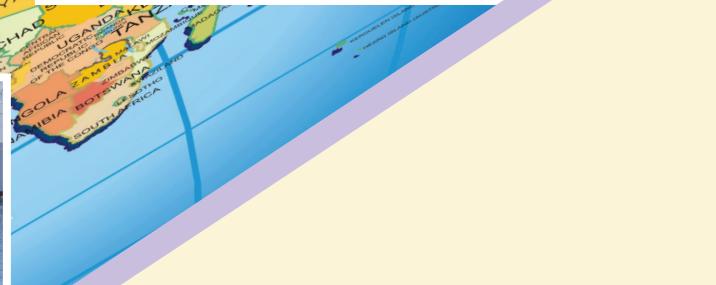


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Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for
Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

South Korea's Lee asks Xi to mediate on North Korea

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said he had asked Chinese President Xi Jinping to play a mediating role in efforts to re-engage North Korea, citing progress in restoring trust with Beijing. Speaking in Shanghai, Lee said Xi acknowledged Seoul's outreach and stressed the need for patience on the nuclear issue. The talks marked Lee's second meeting with Xi in under three months, as Seoul seeks to reset ties with China after years of strain.

Jan 7

China calls for joint counter-terrorism efforts with Pakistan

Chinese Public Security Minister Wang Xiaohong met Pakistan's interior minister in Beijing and said China wants to intensify cooperation with Pakistan against terrorism and telecom crime. Both sides agreed to establish a quarterly security working group and annual meetings. Pakistan's Mohsin Naqvi said protecting Chinese nationals and Belt-and-Road projects is a priority and that a special protection unit will be created as Islamabad seeks Chinese help on cybercrime. They will expand police training, bolster rapid response mechanisms and enhance cooperation on cyber-crime.

Pacific environment body says US must follow formal exit process

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) said the United States must follow a formal withdrawal process after Washington listed it among international bodies it plans to leave. SPREP's director-general said the US remains a valued member until the process is completed. The organisation warned that a US exit could

weaken American influence in the Pacific, where China has expanded ties, though other donors are expected to sustain SPREP's work.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia in talks on JF-17 jets-for-loans deal

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are in talks to convert about \$2 billion in Saudi loans into a deal for JF-17 Thunder fighter jets, according to Pakistani sources. The discussions follow a mutual defence pact signed last year and could be worth up to \$4 billion, including additional equipment. The talks highlight deepening military ties as Pakistan faces financial strain and Saudi Arabia diversifies its security partnerships. The JF-17, jointly developed with China and tested in combat, is central to Islamabad's strategy to expand defence exports and ease fiscal pressures.

India plans to scrap curbs on Chinese firms bidding for government contracts

India's finance ministry plans to remove restrictions imposed in 2020 on Chinese firms bidding for government contracts, two government sources told Reuters. The curbs followed a deadly India-China border clash and effectively barred Chinese companies from projects worth up to \$750 billion. Officials say the move aims to ease shortages and project delays, particularly in power and infrastructure, amid reduced border tensions. A high-level committee has backed easing the rules, though final approval rests with the prime minister's office. The shift could revive competition but also unsettle domestic firms.

Jan 9

Australia to hold wide-ranging inquiry into antisemitism after Bondi attack

Australia will launch a Royal Commission into the Bondi Beach mass shooting that killed 15 people at a Jewish Hanukkah celebration in December, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced. The inquiry, led by retired judge Virginia Bell, will examine the attack, broader antisemitism, and issues of social cohesion and national security. Police say the alleged father-and-son attackers were inspired by Islamic State. The Royal Commission will have powers to compel evidence and will absorb an earlier review of law enforcement preparedness. Findings are expected by December, with an interim report due in April.

US to provide \$45 million to help implement Cambodian-Thai accords

The United States will provide \$45 million in assistance to Cambodia and Thailand to support implementation of the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accords, a senior U.S. diplomat said. The funding includes \$15 million for border stabilisation and displaced communities, \$10 million for demining and clearing unexploded ordnance, and \$20 million to combat scam operations and drug trafficking. The move follows renewed ceasefire efforts after deadly border clashes that killed over 100 people and displaced hundreds of thousands. Washington says the support aims to consolidate peace, stability, and recovery, while advancing broader Indo-Pacific security interests.

Jan 10

North Korea says another South Korean drone entered its airspace

North Korea said a South Korean drone violated its airspace on January 4, marking the second such incident since September, according to state media KCNA. Pyongyang said the drone flew from Incheon, travelled about 8 km inside its territory, and was shot down while conducting surveillance. The claim comes ahead of a key ruling party congress, reinforcing Kim Jong Un's stance that South Korea is a hostile foreign state. Seoul denied operating the drone, saying it does not use that model and will investigate possible civilian involvement. Analysts noted the drone appeared to be a low-cost consumer device, raising questions about its origin and timing.

China, Russia, Iran start 'BRICSPlus' naval exercises in South African waters

China, Russia and Iran launched week-long joint naval drills in South African waters under the expanded "BRICS Plus" framework, in exercises Pretoria said aim to enhance maritime safety and protect shipping routes. South Africa described the operation as apolitical, despite criticism from domestic opposition parties and heightened tensions between several BRICS Plus members and the United States. The drills, dubbed Exercise Will for Peace 2026, include interoperability and joint maritime security operations, with Brazil, Egypt and Ethiopia participating as observers. BRICS Plus, recently expanded beyond its original five members, is increasingly viewed by critics as a

counterweight to Western influence, a characterisation South Africa has rejected.

Jan 11

China voices support for Somalia after top diplomat postpones visit

China reaffirmed its support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity after Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with his Somali counterpart, Beijing said. Wang opposed Somaliland's engagement with Taiwan, reiterating China's stance on Somalia's unity. A planned visit to Somalia during Wang's Africa tour was postponed due to scheduling changes, according to the Chinese embassy.

Tropical Cyclone Leaves Thousands Without Power in Queensland

Thousands of residents in Australia's northeast state of Queensland were left without electricity after Tropical Cyclone Koji made landfall, bringing heavy rain and strong winds. The category one storm crossed the coast north of Brisbane before weakening, but damaged property, boats and roads. Around 15,000 properties lost power, with authorities warning of flooding risks as heavy rainfall is expected to continue.

Bangladesh Signals Interest in Joining International Gaza Stabilisation Force

Bangladesh has informed the United States of its interest in joining a proposed international stabilisation force for Gaza, according to a government statement. National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman conveyed Dhaka's position during meetings with senior U.S. officials in Washington. The move follows a UN Security Council resolution adopted in November authorising the establishment of a temporary international force after a ceasefire took effect in October. Bangladesh did not specify the scale or nature of its potential contribution. The ceasefire remains fragile, with limited progress on subsequent phases amid ongoing violence and humanitarian distress in Gaza.

Myanmar Votes Again in Military's Lopsided Election

Voters in Myanmar cast ballots in the second phase of a general election dominated by a military-backed party, in a contest widely criticised as a bid to legitimise junta rule. The poll comes amid ongoing civil war following the 2021 coup that ousted the elected government and detained

former leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Major opposition parties have been dissolved, while armed resistance groups boycotted the vote. The military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party is on course for a decisive victory after sweeping most seats in the first phase. The junta says a new government will be formed in April, though international recognition remains uncertain.

Jan 12

US to push for quicker action in reducing reliance on China for rare earths

The United States will urge G7 countries and key partners to accelerate efforts to reduce dependence on China for critical minerals, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said ahead of a high-level meeting in Washington. Officials from the G7, EU, Australia, India, South Korea and Mexico will attend. Bessent has voiced frustration over slow progress despite earlier commitments. China dominates much of the global supply of rare earths and other critical minerals vital for defence, clean energy and technology. The U.S. is pressing for faster coordination, diversification of supply chains and expanded domestic and allied production.

Japan Sets Sail on Rare Earth Hunt as China Tightens Supplies

Japan has launched a pioneering mission to extract rare earths from the seabed, seeking to reduce its dependence on China as Beijing tightens controls on critical minerals. The research vessel Chikyu departed for waters near Minamitorii Island to conduct the world's first test of continuously lifting rare-earth-rich mud from a depth of about six kilometres. The month-long expedition is part of Tokyo's broader strategy to diversify supply chains vital for cars, electronics, and defence industries. The effort follows recent Chinese restrictions on dual-use exports and echoes past supply disruptions that pushed Japan to invest in alternative sources.

Gambia Tells World Court Myanmar Turned Rohingya Lives into a Nightmare

The West African nation of Gambia has told the International Court of Justice that Myanmar deliberately targeted the Rohingya minority for destruction, making their lives "a nightmare". Opening the first full genocide case heard by the court in over a decade, Gambia said Myanmar's actions in Rakhine

state amounted to genocide. Myanmar denies the charge, calling its 2017 military campaign counter-terrorism. The case could have global implications, including for other genocide proceedings before the court. Rohingya victims are expected to testify later in the hearings.

Jan 13

India's Source Code Push Alarms Smartphone Giants

India is considering sweeping smartphone security rules that could require manufacturers to share source code with the government, triggering resistance from global tech firms. The proposed framework, part of New Delhi's broader digital security overhaul, has raised concerns among companies including Apple, Samsung and Google, which argue the move lacks global precedent and risks exposing proprietary technology. The India government says consultations are ongoing and industry concerns will be addressed. Officials maintain the aim is stronger user data protection

Merz Signals EU-India Trade Deal Could Be Sealed by January End

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has suggested that the European Union and India could finalise a long-negotiated free trade agreement by the end of January. Speaking in Ahmedabad after talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Merz said momentum was building for a breakthrough. The EU is seeking tariff cuts on cars, medical devices, wine, spirits and meat, while India wants duty-free access for labour-intensive exports. The deal is seen as strategically important as global protectionism rises and India-U.S. trade talks remain stalled.

Jan 14

Drone Attacks Hit Black Sea Tankers as Kazakh Oil Output Slumps

Two oil tankers were struck by drones in the Black Sea while heading towards a key terminal exporting Kazakh crude, companies and sources said, underscoring rising risks to regional energy flows. One vessel was chartered by Chevron, which said its crew was safe and the ship remained stable. The attacks come amid a sharp fall in Kazakhstan's oil output, down 35% in early January due to export disruptions via Russia. The incidents have driven up war-risk insurance costs for shipping in the

strategically vital Black Sea.

Cambodia Accuses Thai Troops of Occupying Civilian Areas, Testing Truce

Cambodia has accused Thailand of continuing to occupy civilian areas along their disputed border, raising concerns over a December ceasefire that ended weeks of deadly clashes. Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn said Thai forces had fortified locations with barriers, preventing up to 4,000 families from returning home. Thailand dismissed the claims as "baseless," saying current troop positions comply with the truce. Cambodia has sought further boundary talks, while noting China played an active role in brokering the fragile peace.

UAE Joins US-Led AI Supply Chain Drive, Deepening Economic Ties

The United Arab Emirates has joined a U.S.-led initiative to secure artificial intelligence and semiconductor supply chains, strengthening economic cooperation with the United States. The programme, known as Pax Silica, is part of President Donald Trump's strategy to reduce reliance on rival nations and reinforce ties among partners. Washington sees the UAE as a key contributor across logistics, industrial capacity and capital. Abu Dhabi has invested heavily to become a global AI hub, seeking access to advanced U.S. technology and chips.

Jan 15

US to Suspend Immigrant Visa Processing for 75 Countries

The United States will suspend immigrant visa processing for applicants from 75 countries from January 21, as the administration of President Donald Trump intensifies its immigration crackdown. The U.S. State Department said the pause follows a policy review aimed at tighter screening, citing concerns that applicants from the affected countries pose a higher risk of becoming a "public charge". The suspension covers nations across Latin America, South Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Caribbean, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Brazil and Nigeria. Critics argue the move disproportionately targets legal immigrants and could block hundreds of thousands of applicants.

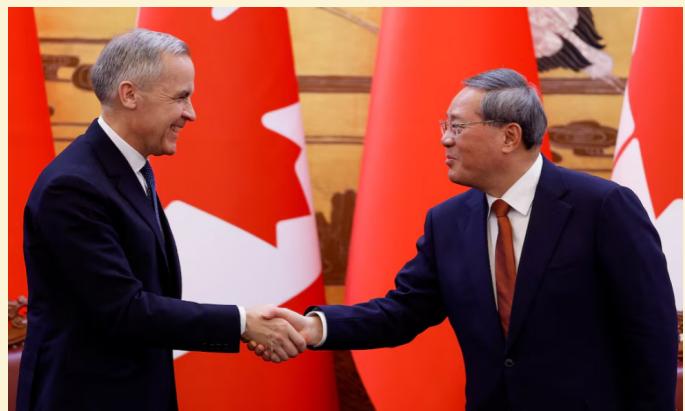
Japan, Philippines Deepen Security Ties amid Rising Regional Tensions



Japan and the Philippines have signed two new defence agreements aimed at strengthening military cooperation as regional security tensions intensify. The pacts include an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement allowing their armed forces to exchange supplies and services, building on a recently implemented Reciprocal Access Agreement. Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said trilateral cooperation with the United States was crucial in an increasingly severe strategic environment. Manila described Japan as a vital strategic partner, particularly in upholding maritime security and the rule of law in East Asia.

Jan 16

Carney Hails Reset with China, Signs New Energy Cooperation Pact



Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has praised warming ties with China during his first visit to Beijing since taking office, declaring that the two countries are charting a new course after years of strain. Carney met President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang, and signed a trade and economic road-map that includes an energy cooperation framework. The pact signals potential collaboration in oil, gas and uranium. The visit reflects Canada's push to diversify trade amid tensions with the United

States and renewed global economic uncertainty.

Taiwan Seeks Role as Strategic AI Partner in US Tariff Deal

Taiwan aims to become a strategic artificial intelligence partner of the United States after reaching a deal to cut tariffs and boost two-way investment, Vice Premier Cheng Li-chiun said. The agreement encourages Taiwanese investment in U.S. semiconductors, AI and energy, while keeping decisions company-led. Washington sees Taiwan as a key chip partner, with firms such as TSMC already committing major investments. Taipei said the pact would strengthen supply-chain resilience and position Taiwan as a close AI collaborator, even as it risks objections from China.

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Jan 17

China Says It Monitored US Warships in Taiwan Strait

China's military said it monitored U.S. naval vessels transiting the Taiwan Strait, underscoring heightened tensions. The People's Liberation Army said it tracked the USS Finn and USNS Mary Sears, stressing it remains on high alert to defend national sovereignty. The U.S. Department of Defense did not comment.

UN High Seas Biodiversity Treaty Takes Effect, Targets 30% Ocean Protection

A landmark United Nations treaty to protect biodiversity in international waters has entered into force, creating a legal framework to safeguard the high seas. Known as Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, the agreement aims to bring 30% of the world's oceans under protection by 2030 through marine protected areas and

environmental impact assessments. More than 80 countries have ratified the treaty, including China, Brazil and Japan. Supporters say universal ratification is crucial, as only about 8% of oceans are currently protected.

Jan 18

South Korea Seeks Favourable US Chip Tariff Terms

South Korea will negotiate with the United States to secure favourable tariff treatment for its semiconductor exports, a presidential office official said. Seoul plans to rely on provisions in a bilateral trade fact sheet that aim to prevent South Korea from being treated less favourably than key competitors under U.S. chip tariffs announced by the administration of Donald Trump. Officials said the impact of tariffs on advanced computing chips would likely be limited. Major memory chipmakers Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix are among the firms most closely watching the talks.

Pakistan Invited by US to Join Gaza Peace Board

Pakistan has received an invitation from the United States to join a proposed Board of Peace on Gaza, Pakistan's foreign ministry said. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was invited by U.S. President Donald Trump as Washington seeks broader international engagement on post-war arrangements. Islamabad said it would continue to support international efforts aimed at peace and security in Gaza and a lasting resolution of the Palestine issue, in line with United Nations resolutions. The invitation underscores Pakistan's diplomatic role amid ongoing conflict and humanitarian devastation in the enclave.

Jan 19

Iran Says Protest Death Toll Verified at 5,000

An Iranian official said authorities have verified at least 5,000 deaths during recent protests across Iran, including around 500 members of the security forces. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official blamed "terrorists and armed rioters" for the violence and said the heaviest clashes occurred in Kurdish-populated areas in northwest Iran. The official added that the final toll was unlikely to rise significantly and accused foreign enemies, including Israel, of supporting unrest. Independent rights groups have reported lower confirmed death figures and tens of thousands of arrests, highlighting starkly differing accounts of the scale of the violence.

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