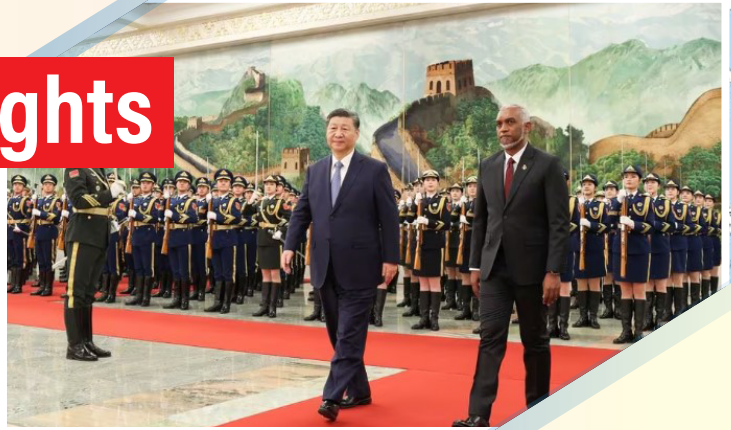


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Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

January 11

Myanmar Junta Chief Meets ASEAN Envoy Amid Peace Frustration



Myanmar's junta chief, Min Aung Hlaing, held talks with ASEAN envoy Alounkeo Kittikhoun as Laos assumed the bloc's chairmanship. Frustration persists over the junta's reluctance to commit to peace efforts outlined in the 2021 ASEAN plan. Myanmar faces escalating violence from ethnic minority armies and pro-democracy militias. The junta's five-point roadmap contrasts with ASEAN's consensus, emphasizing pandemic recovery and a new election overseen by its poll body. The meeting, unacknowledged by Laos, underscores ASEAN's challenge in mediating with a junta that refuses dialogue with the opposition. The National Unity Government urges direct engagement with all stakeholders.

January 10

China and Maldives Strengthen Ties Amidst Pivot From India

China and the Maldives elevated their relationship to a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" during President Mohamed Muizzu's state visit to Beijing. President Xi Jinping, labeling Muizzu an "old friend," set the stage for increased Chinese investment in the Indian Ocean archipelago. Muizzu, who won on an "India Out" platform, highlighted China's role in economic success and infrastructure development. Despite owing China \$1.37 billion, 20% of its public debt, the Maldives seeks Chinese investment opportunities. The move signals China's regional influence as India confronts challenges with neighbors like Sri Lanka aligning with Beijing.

January 12

Ceasefire Agreed in Northern Myanmar Amid Rebel Alliance's Challenge to Junta

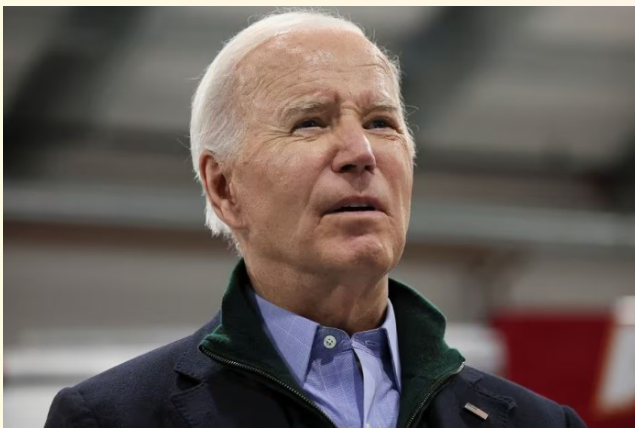
A ceasefire has reportedly been agreed upon between the ruling military junta and the rebel alliance in northern Myanmar, following China-mediated talks. The months-long coordinated offensive by ethnic minority armies, supported by a parallel pro-democracy government, posed a significant challenge to the junta's control. The "Three Brotherhood Alliance" and the military agreed to refrain from offensive attacks, including airstrikes and heavy weapons. The ceasefire, confirmed during peace talks in Kunming, aims to prevent further violence and protect residents at the Chinese border. While Beijing urges implementation, fighting continues in parts of the country, causing displacement and border crossings.

January 13

Taiwan Elects Lai Ching-te, Rejects Chinese Pressure for DPP's Third Term

Taiwanese voters propelled Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Lai Ching-te to victory, rejecting Chinese pressure and securing the party's unprecedented third successive term. While Lai celebrated the win, the DPP lost its parliamentary majority, reflecting public frustration over domestic issues. Lai, winning 40% of the vote, pledged to maintain the cross-strait status quo but asserted determination in safeguarding Taiwan from Chinese threats. Expressing a desire for cooperation, he called for equal dialogue with Beijing to replace confrontation. The election outcome underscores the complex challenges facing Taiwan in both domestic and international contexts.

Biden Affirms U.S. Position on Taiwan Independence After Election



U.S. President Joe Biden clarified that the United States does not support the independence of Taiwan, following the island's elections where the ruling Democratic Progressive Party secured a third term.

Biden's statement seeks to reassure Beijing, emphasizing the U.S. position of "strategic ambiguity." While congratulating the newly elected president, Lai Ching-te, Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized the commitment to cross-strait peace and stability, adhering to the U.S. one China policy. Amid concerns of heightened tensions with China, Biden plans to send an unofficial delegation to Taiwan as a symbolic show of support.

January 14

North Korea Tests Hypersonic Missile Amid Escalating Tensions



North Korea conducted a test of a new solid-fuel hypersonic missile with intermediate range on Sunday, according to state news agency KCNA. The move was condemned by the United States, South Korea, and Japan. The test aimed to assess the reliability of new multi-stage solid-fuel engines and an intermediate-range hypersonic maneuverable warhead. South Korea criticized the launch as a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, promising an "overwhelming response" to provocations. The test coincided with a delegation's departure to Russia, fueling tensions amidst North Korea's recent missile launches and closer ties with Moscow, raising concerns for regional stability.

January 15

Philippines Plans Island Development Amid South China Sea Tensions

Amidst escalating tensions with China, the Philippines announces plans to develop islands in the South China Sea, claiming them as part of its territory. Military Chief Romeo Brawner revealed the initiative to enhance habitability for troops on the disputed islands, including Thitu (Pag-asa), strategically crucial in the contested region. The move follows accusations of aggressive behavior between the two nations. The Philippines occupies nine features in the South China Sea, asserting its exclusive economic zone. As part of modernization, the military aims to acquire additional ships, radars, and aircraft, signaling a shift towards territorial defense from internal concerns.

Ethnic Armed Group Claims Control of Myanmar Town Amid Junta Struggles

The Arakan Army (AA) declares it has seized control of Paletwa, a strategic port town in western Myanmar bordering India and Bangladesh, intensifying challenges for the military junta. The AA spokesperson stated the group's commitment to cooperating with neighboring countries on border stability, assuming administration and law enforcement in the area. Myanmar faces a multi-front insurgency as anti-junta forces, supported by a pro-democracy parallel government, gain control of military posts and towns. The junta, grappling with its most significant challenge since the 2021 coup, has not commented on the AA's claim. The region experiences heightened tension amid reported ceasefire breaches.

January 16

Pacific Naval Officials Convene in China Amidst South China Sea Tensions

Naval representatives from Pacific-bordering nations, including Japan, Russia, and the United States, are meeting in Nanjing, China, to address rule updates for unexpected maritime encounters. The three-day talks involve 70 delegates from 30 countries, coinciding with heightened tensions in the South China Sea, particularly between China and the Philippines. Amidst competing territorial claims, Manila announced plans to develop disputed islands. The meeting sets the stage for the April Western Pacific Naval Symposium in Qingdao, emphasizing broader regional security concerns. Previous symposiums addressed three-way security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the participants' strategic dialogues.

January 17

Pakistan Recalls Ambassador Over Alleged Iranian Missile Strikes

Pakistan has withdrawn its ambassador from Iran in protest of what it claims is a "blatant breach" of its sovereignty. Tensions escalated after Iran launched missile attacks on alleged militant bases in southwestern Pakistan, causing the death of two children. While Iran's Foreign Minister insists only militants were targeted, Pakistan condemns the violation and reserves the right to respond. This cross-border incident, the highest-profile in recent years, strains historically rocky relations. The recall of ambassadors, canceled trade meetings, and potential further escalation raise concerns, with analysts suggesting China may play a role in mediating between the two nations.

U.S. Congressional Committee Expresses Concerns Over Indo-Pacific Fuel Redistribution Plan

The U.S. House of Representatives' select committee on China has raised doubts about the Pentagon's plan to shift fuel from Hawaii's Red Hill storage facility across the Indo-Pacific. In a letter to Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro, Republican chair Mike Gallagher highlighted the strategic imperative amid China's military buildup but expressed skepticism about a long-term solution. Concerns include potential logistics gaps, operational risks, and the need for more ships. Gallagher urged clarity on fuel storage, refinery capacity, and collaboration with allies. With China's expanding navy, the committee emphasizes addressing logistical weaknesses in the Indo-Pacific promptly.

January 18

Unprecedented Russo-North Korean Military Cooperation Sparks Alarming Shift in Security Landscape

The White House's senior director for arms control, Pranay Vaddi, has raised concerns over an unprecedented level of military cooperation between North Korea and Russia, emphasizing the potential for a drastic transformation in the nature of the security threat posed by North Korea. Speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Vaddi urged scrutiny not only on North Korea's support for Russia in the Ukraine conflict but also on the reciprocal impact. He emphasized the need to assess how this collaboration could enhance North Korea's capabilities, prompting a reassessment of the United States' extended deterrence posture in the region. Vaddi affirmed ongoing collaboration with South Korea to fortify their joint extended deterrence against the evolving North Korean threat.

China and Philippines Commit to Diplomacy in Resolving South China Sea Tensions

In a joint statement, China and the Philippines announced their commitment to enhancing maritime communication and managing conflicts through amicable dialogue in the South China Sea. During the eighth meeting of the China-Philippines Bilateral Consultation Mechanism in Shanghai, Assistant Foreign Minister Nong Rong and Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro discussed the recent tensions in disputed waters. Both sides acknowledged that the South China Sea dispute doesn't define their entire bilateral relationship. Despite recent confrontations, including an alleged ship ramming incident, China and the Philippines expressed the importance of communication and diplomacy to ensure maritime peace and stability, agreeing to handle incidents diplomatically.

Pakistan and Iran Express Willingness to Collaborate Amid Cross-Border Strikes

In the aftermath of recent cross-border drone and missile strikes, Pakistan conveyed its commitment to addressing all issues collaboratively with Iran. Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani engaged with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amirabdollahian, emphasizing mutual trust and cooperation. The strikes, a response to militant activities, raised concerns about regional stability amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. Despite historical tensions, both nations aim to de-escalate, focusing on enhanced security cooperation. The dialogue aligns with Pakistan's stance expressed in a recent call with Turkey, affirming a disinterest in escalation. Iran underscores the importance of bilateral cooperation to eradicate terrorist camps on Pakistani soil.

U.S. and Japan Explore Naval Collaboration to Counter Growing Chinese Presence



U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel revealed that the United States and Japan are in talks for Japanese shipyards to regularly service and maintain U.S. Navy warships in Asian waters. Emanuel emphasized the need for a visible deterrent against China's expanding navy. China, now possessing over 370 ships and submarines, has surpassed the U.S. numerically. Utilizing Japanese dry docks aims to alleviate maintenance backlogs in the U.S., allowing a strategic focus on shipbuilding. Washington and Tokyo have established a council to devise a joint plan for maintenance work, reflecting their commitment to bolstering naval capabilities in the region.

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