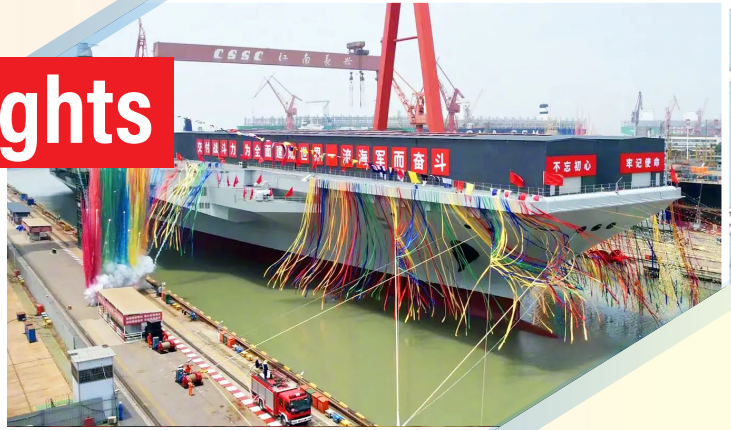


8 January | 2024

Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

December 27

Indonesian Protesters Demand Rohingya Deportation, Storm Shelter



December 26

Taiwan Joins Western Sanctions to Halt Tech Use in Weapons Targeting Russia

Taiwan's economy ministry expanded sanctions on Russia and Belarus, aiming to prevent high-tech goods from being used for military purposes amid the Ukraine conflict. The list includes semiconductor equipment, chemicals, and medicines. Taiwan, symbolically supporting Western sanctions, condemned Russia's invasion. The move aligns with EU and U.S. measures, targeting components with dual-use potential in weaponry. The ministry cited international cooperation and noted that export license applications for listed items would generally be denied. Public sympathy in Taiwan for Ukraine reflects concerns about parallels with a potential scenario if China asserts control over the island it claims.

In Banda Aceh, Indonesia, a group of students stormed a convention center housing Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, demanding their deportation. The students, fueled by online misinformation and hate speech, broke police cordon, forcibly removed 137 refugees, and relocated them in trucks. The UN Refugee Agency condemned the attack, highlighting the vulnerability of the refugee families, mainly children and women. The incident reflects the growing hostility towards Rohingya refugees in Indonesia, attributed to frustrations over increasing arrivals. Indonesian President Joko Widodo attributes the surge to human trafficking, pledging temporary shelter collaboration with international organizations. Indonesia, not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, has historically accepted refugees arriving in the country. Since November, over 1,500 Rohingya have landed in Indonesia.

December 28

China Criticizes U.S. 'Cold War' Mindset and Regional Interference

China's defense ministry criticized the United States, alleging the perpetuation of a "Cold War" mindset and interference in the Asia Pacific region. This rebuke followed high-level talks held a week ago, during which both nations committed to avoiding miscalculations. China expressed dissatisfaction with the U.S.'s deployments in the Asia-Pacific and attributed tensions in the South China Sea to American support for the Philippines against China. China anticipates tangible actions from the U.S. to ensure the consistent development of military-to-military relations. In reference to Taiwan's upcoming presidential election, China cautioned against U.S. interference and the arming of Taiwan.

December 30

ASEAN Ministers Worried About South China Sea Tensions



ASEAN foreign ministers have expressed concern over escalating tensions in the South China Sea, emphasizing the potential threat to regional peace. The statement comes amid increased disputes between China and the Philippines, with accusations over a series of maritime run-ins exchanged and diplomatic efforts perceived as heading in a "poor direction." China dismissed the accusations as "purely false hype" and criticized Philippine provocations. The ministers called for self-restraint in activities that could escalate conflicts and stressed the importance of peaceful dialogue to promote regional stability. Despite efforts to establish a code of conduct in the South China Sea since 2002, progress has been slow, raising concerns about China's commitment to binding rules consistent with international law.

January 1

Over 140 Rohingyas Reach Indonesia Amid Growing Hostility

More than 140 Rohingyas, primarily women and children, arrived in Indonesia's North Sumatra province over the weekend, adding to a recent surge in arrivals of the persecuted Myanmar Muslim minority. The Rohingyas, escaping hostility, reached North Sumatra's Deli Serdang area by boat on December 30. Indonesia has seen over 1,500 Rohingya arrivals since November, with the ethnic minority facing rejection and rising hostility. Myanmar's Rohingyas continue to flee persecution, seeking refuge in Indonesia and neighboring Malaysia during the calmer seas from November to April.

January 2

US Extends Military Deal with Non NATO Ally Qatar for 10 More Years



U.S. President Joe Biden has decided to extend the military presence deal with major ally Qatar for another ten years. The Al Udeid Air Base, the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East located in Qatar, holds strategic importance. The extension of this deal is crucial for the USA, as Qatar plays a significant role in mediating the release of hostages by Hamas in the ongoing Gaza war. In the past, Qatar has facilitated mediation with the Taliban on behalf of the USA and assisted in the release of American prisoners from Iran in 2021 and Venezuela in 2023.

To boost tourism, Thailand and China have decided to exempt their citizens from visa requirements

Starting from March, 2024, China and Thailand will permanently remove visa requirements for their respective citizens to enhance diplomatic relations and encourage cultural exchange. Embracing a 'People-to-people' approach, both China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin and Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin expressed excitement about the mutual visa exemption.

They confirmed that both countries have already initiated essential communications to facilitate this change. Thailand, with its tourist-oriented economy, derives a significant portion of its revenue from the tourism sector. Notably, China was one of the leading countries visiting Thailand before the COVID era. Despite a drop in visitor numbers to 3.5 million post-COVID, China still holds the second position on Thailand's global tourist list.

China Unveils Advanced Aircraft Carrier Fujian with Next-Gen Launch Technology

China's state media unveiled images of the Fujian, its most advanced aircraft carrier, showcasing next-gen launch tracks for a wider range of aircraft. Revealed in June 2022, the domestically designed and built carrier is larger and more technologically advanced than the Shandong and Liaoning. Yet to undergo sea trials, it features an electromagnetic catapult system for more aircraft types. The Fujian aims to enhance China's military capabilities, marking a milestone in its modernization efforts.

January 4

South Korea and U.S. Conduct Joint Firing Drills Amid North Korean Tensions

South Korean and U.S. troops completed joint combat firing drills near the North Korean border, utilizing heavy weapons. The week-long exercise involved a South Korean mechanized infantry brigade and a U.S. Army armored Stryker brigade, testing combat readiness against simulated enemy aggression. As tensions escalate on the Korean Peninsula, the allies have intensified joint drills. North Korea condemned the exercises, labeling them "reckless war maneuvers" and expressing concern over increased U.S. military presence. The situation remains volatile, with North Korea foreseeing 2024 as a high-risk year for conflict.

China and Philippines Establish Communication Channel to Address South China Sea Disputes

China and the Philippines have agreed to establish a direct communications channel between their foreign ministries to peacefully handle South China Sea disputes, easing tensions. The agreement includes 14 elements to improve security and economic cooperation. The move follows strained relations after the 2016 arbitral ruling favoring the Philippines. Both countries pledged to respect sovereignty and territorial integrity. Discussions on oil and gas exploration, renewable energy, and strategic monitoring are set to resume. China committed \$22.8 billion in investment pledges, enhancing economic ties as the Philippines reopens its borders post-pandemic.

January 5

Nepal Suspends Work Permits for Russia and Ukraine After Soldier Casualties

In response to the deaths of at least 10 Nepali soldiers in the Russian army, Nepal has temporarily halted the issuance of work permits for its citizens in Russia and Ukraine. The government urges Russia to cease recruiting Nepali citizens and compensate affected families. Approximately 200 Nepalis were working in the Russian army, with around 100 reported missing. The decision, aiming to protect citizens, remains in effect until further notice. This action comes amidst allegations of illegal recruitment and heightened tensions between Russia and Ukraine since February 2022.

Indian Navy Thwarts Hijack Attempt in Arabian Sea, Rescues Crew

The Indian Navy successfully thwarted an attempted hijacking in the Arabian Sea, rescuing the crew of the Liberian-flagged MV Lila Norfolk. Responding to a report received by the UK Maritime Trade Operations agency, an Indian Navy warship intercepted the vessel, evacuating all 21 crew members. The ship, chartered by Anglo-American, was en route to Bahrain from Rio de Janeiro. Experts suggest the resurgence in pirate attacks is due to a shift in anti-piracy focus, with recent data revealing at least three hijackings in December, marking a revival after a six-year lull.

January 6

Myanmar Rebel Alliance Takes Control of Key Town on China Border



The Three Brotherhood Alliance, consisting of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, and the Arakan Army, announced the capture of Laukkai town along Myanmar's northern border. After weeks of intense fighting, the rebels claimed victory as the military's regional headquarters surrendered. This marks a significant development in their offensive, posing a substantial challenge to Myanmar's military government since the 2021 coup. The alliance's coordination, including support from the People's Defence Force and Myanmar's parallel National Unity Government, suggests heightened planning.

China Imposes Sanctions on U.S. Military Manufacturers Over Taiwan Arms Sales

China announced sanctions on five U.S. military manufacturers in response to the latest arms sales to Taiwan, escalating tensions between Beijing and Washington. The move comes ahead of Taiwan's Jan. 13 elections, with China framing them as a choice between war and peace. The sanctioned companies include BAE Systems Land and Armaments, Alliant Techsystems Operations, AeroVironment, Viasat, and Data Link Solutions. China will freeze their assets and prohibit engagement with them. The U.S. State Department had recently approved a \$300 million sale of equipment to support Taiwan's tactical information systems.

Contributors

Shamsuddoza Sajen

Journalist and Researcher

sajen1986@gmail.com

Debi Karmakar

Research Assistant at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)

debi@cgs-bd.com

Trapa Sarker

Research intern at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)

trapa@cgs-bd.com

Bahauddin Ahmed

Digital Coordinator at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)

bahauddin@cgs-bd.com



45/1, New Eskaton, 2nd Floor, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

Email: ed@cgs-bd.com, Web: www.cgs-bd.com