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Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

April 3

Indonesia's President-Elect Pursues Ties with Japan and China



Indonesia's president-elect, Prabowo Subianto, has indicated his intention to enhance security and economic collaboration with Japan and China. Following his meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Prabowo expressed his commitment to bolstering the cooperative relationship between the two nations. This declaration follows closely on the heels of a similar expression of interest in strengthening ties with Chinese President Xi Jinping during Prabowo's recent visit to Beijing. The pursuit of Indonesia, a pivotal Southeast Asian nation situated along the contested South China Sea, underscores the strategic significance of the region for both Tokyo and Beijing. Despite concerns raised about Prabowo's human rights record, stemming from alleged military abuses, he denies these accusations. Overall, the incoming Indonesian leader aims to navigate diplomatic relations with major global powers while addressing the nation's security and economic imperatives.

April 2

India Rejects China's Renaming of Arunachal Pradesh Amid Ongoing Border Tensions

India has vehemently rejected China's attempt to rename approximately 30 locations in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, denouncing it as "senseless" and reasserting the region's integral status within India. China lays claim to the area, referring to it as South Tibet, a claim consistently rebuffed by India. Tensions between the two nuclear-armed nations have manifested in sporadic border confrontations, with Arunachal Pradesh serving as a persistent flashpoint. Notably, the United States has intervened, affirming Arunachal Pradesh as an Indian territory and condemning any unilateral assertions made by China. The protracted border dispute, spanning the 3,800 km frontier, has prompted military escalations and skirmishes, exacerbating the already unresolved territorial impasse.

April 5

U.S.-China Military Tensions: Talks Held in Hawaii to Promote Operational Safety



U.S. and Chinese military officials convened a series of meetings in Hawaii this week to address operational safety amidst escalating tensions surrounding the South China Sea. Termed as the military maritime consultative agreement (MMCA) working group, these discussions marked the first of their kind since 2021. Initiated subsequent to an agreement between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping to resume direct military dialogues in November, the talks primarily centered on reviewing safety-related incidents and upholding operational security, as stated by the U.S. However, China vehemently opposed any actions perceived as encroaching upon its sovereignty in the region, particularly under the guise of freedom of navigation. These recent engagements underscore the ongoing efforts by both superpowers to navigate their military tensions amidst a backdrop of broader strategic competition.

April 6

Potential Inclusion of Japan in AUKUS: Challenges and Opportunities

The UK, US, and Australia are deliberating the inclusion of Japan in their AUKUS security pact, particularly focusing on advanced capabilities projects within its second pillar. However, significant hurdles remain, primarily stemming from US export control restrictions and Japan's imperative to enhance its cyber defenses and data protection measures. While AUKUS partners acknowledge Japan's strengths as advantageous, experts caution against premature integration, citing ongoing challenges in U.S. coordination with the UK and Australia.

This contemplated move reflects the AUKUS members' concerted efforts to enhance regional cooperation in countering China's escalating influence in the Indo-Pacific. Yet, the realization of this goal hinges upon surmounting technical and policy obstacles. Japan's initiatives to fortify its economic security and cyber capabilities are deemed essential for facilitating potential involvement in AUKUS initiatives.

Pakistan Condemns Indian Defense Minister's Threat of Cross-Border Operations

Pakistan has strongly criticized "provocative remarks" made by Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh, who stated that India would pursue individuals fleeing after attempting militant attacks in Pakistan. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry has asserted that India's declaration of its readiness for extrajudicial actions inside Pakistan amounts to an acknowledgment of guilt. This latest escalation occurs against a backdrop of longstanding tensions between the two nations, including India's airstrike on a suspected militant facility in Pakistan in 2019 and allegations from Canada and the U.S. implicating India in killings or attempted killings on their soil.

Prime Minister Modi has pledged to investigate any information regarding such incidents. However, these developments unfold within the broader context of enduring security and diplomatic disputes between the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

April 8

U.S. Treasury Secretary Warns Against Chinese Subsidized Imports Threatening New Industries

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen issued a stern warning against the decimation of emerging industries by subsidized Chinese imports, drawing parallels to the steel sector's plight a decade ago. Yellen expressed apprehension over China's substantial investments in sectors such as electric vehicles, batteries, and solar products, fueled by extensive government backing. Emphasizing the Biden administration's stance, she affirmed the rejection of artificially cheap Chinese goods flooding the global market, posing a threat to the sustainability of American and foreign enterprises alike. Yellen's remarks followed four days of discussions with Chinese officials, during which she aimed to advocate for American interests.

April 9

Thai Prime Minister Calls for Sensitive Dialogue Amid Myanmar's Escalating Conflict

Thailand's newly appointed Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, has recognized the imperative for delicate negotiations between Myanmar's military junta and anti-junta factions to address the worsening crisis in the neighboring nation. Myanmar finds itself embroiled in a widespread insurgency, as pro-democracy groups seize control of military installations and towns, posing a formidable challenge to the ruling junta. Srettha noted a perceived decline in the junta's authority, presenting an opportune moment to initiate dialogue.

Given Thailand's extensive border with Myanmar, the country has undertaken various efforts, including the provision of humanitarian assistance, to facilitate discussions between the conflicting parties. Despite objections from the Myanmar regime, Thai officials have convened seminars on the Myanmar situation, involving opponents of the military junta, in a bid to foster dialogue and understanding amidst the escalating tensions.

April 11

Trilateral Agreement to Reshape South China Sea Dynamics, Says Philippine President



President Marcos asserts that the recent agreement among the Philippines, the United States, and Japan will have far-reaching implications for the South China Sea and beyond. The three leaders have voiced "serious concerns" over China's "dangerous and aggressive behavior" in the region, which serves as a critical maritime route. Marcos underlines that the summit aims to bolster economic and security cooperation among the participating nations rather than target any specific country.

The agreement encompasses expanded US access to Philippine bases and the potential for substantial investment deals. The US has reaffirmed its commitment to uphold the Philippines' defense under their mutual defense treaty, while the House of Representatives has voiced support for Marcos' endeavors to safeguard the country's interests in the West Philippine Sea and promote regional stability.

China Imposes Sanctions on U.S. Defense Firms Over Taiwan Arms Sales

China has implemented sanctions against two prominent U.S. defense firms, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems and General Dynamics Land Systems, in retaliation for their arms sales to Taiwan. These sanctions entail barring senior executives from entering China and freezing the companies' assets. China contends that these arms deals "seriously interfere" with its internal affairs and undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Last year, China similarly targeted Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin for comparable reasons. This latest action is viewed as part of China's broader strategy to assert its claims over Taiwan and the South China Sea. Meanwhile, the U.S. is strengthening security cooperation with regional allies like Japan and the Philippines to counter China's escalating assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.

April 12

Solomon Islands Election: A Crucible of U.S.-China Rivalry in the South Pacific

The forthcoming national election in the Solomon Islands, the first since Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare's alignment with China through a security pact, stands as a potential flashpoint in the ongoing U.S.-China competition in the South Pacific. While voters prioritize domestic issues such as healthcare and infrastructure, Sogavare's pivot towards China looms large as a central concern. Opposition parties pledge to nullify the security pact or subject it to a referendum, seeking to diminish China's influence by strengthening ties with U.S. allies.

Of particular interest are the election results in Malaita province, which has voiced opposition to the Solomon Islands' ties with China. Australia has deployed security forces to support the electoral process, contrasting with the Chinese police's role limited to training. The election's outcome holds significant geopolitical ramifications for the broader region, shaping the balance of power in the South Pacific.

April 14

Kim Jong Un Affirms Commitment to Strengthen Ties with China

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reaffirmed his commitment to fostering strong ties with China during a meeting with Chinese top legislator Zhao Leji, according to state media KCNA. Zhao's visit, the highest-ranking Chinese delegation since 2018, underscores the enduring alliance between the two nations. China serves as North Korea's chief ally and economic support, particularly amid stringent U.N. sanctions. Kim expressed optimism for further strengthening bilateral relations, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the "durable traditions of friendship." The talks, characterized by a "kind, sincere, and comradely atmosphere," concluded with mutual appreciation, signaling ongoing diplomatic efforts between Pyongyang and Beijing.

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