

12 August | 2024

# Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



## A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

China asserts jurisdiction over the waterway, while Taiwan and the U.S. view it as international. Taiwan's defense ministry confirmed normal conditions and full control over the strait during the transit.

### August 2

#### Germany Joins U.S.-Led United Nations Command in South Korea

Germany joined the U.S.-led United Nations Command (UNC) on Friday, becoming the 18th member nation in the group overseeing the heavily fortified border with North Korea. This move reflects Berlin's commitment to linking European security with the Indo-Pacific region, according to Defense Minister Boris Pistorius. The UNC, established in 1950, now seeks to broaden its role in regional security amidst global crises. U.S. Army General Paul LaCamera praised Germany's addition for enhancing the command's capabilities. The UNC's expansion aligns with growing international alliances and highlights concerns over North Korea's military ties with Russia and broader regional tensions.

### August 4

#### Imran Khan Calls for Better Relations with Pakistan's Military Amid Ongoing Imprisonment

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, jailed on various charges, said that maintaining strong relations with the military is crucial for Pakistan, despite blaming them for his ouster and imprisonment.

### August 1

#### Canadian Warship's Taiwan Strait Passage Draws Chinese Rebuke



A Canadian warship, HMCS Montreal, navigated the Taiwan Strait on July 31, underscoring Canada's commitment to an "open and inclusive" Indo-Pacific, according to Defense Minister Bill Blair. The move is part of Canada's increased naval presence in the region, as outlined in its 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy. China condemned the passage, with PLA Eastern Theater Command spokesperson Li Xi accusing Canada of disrupting peace and stability in the strait.

Ahead of the anniversary of his incarceration, Khan emphasized his respect for the military institution while criticizing individual leaders. He offered to engage in "conditional negotiations" with the military if transparent elections are held and charges against his supporters are dropped. Khan remains critical of the U.S., which he also blames for his removal, but maintains that any dialogue with the military should be aimed at improving Pakistan's situation.

## August 5

---

### U.S. Considers Cocos Islands for Military Construction to Counter China

The U.S. is considering the remote Cocos Islands for potential military construction under the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, aimed at bolstering U.S. force posture in the Indo-Pacific. The Cocos Islands, located 3,000 km west of mainland Australia near a key chokepoint for Chinese oil shipments, is listed alongside the Philippines, Timor Leste, and Papua New Guinea. While the U.S. Navy has published a tender for infrastructure projects in the region, a spokesperson noted that these may or may not support the Darwin Marines Rotational Force. Australia is already planning to expand its airfield on the islands to accommodate larger military aircraft.

## August 6

---

### North Korea Criticizes Germany's Role in U.S.-Led UN Border Force

North Korea has condemned Germany's recent addition to the U.S.-led United Nations Command (UNC) on the Korean Peninsula, accusing the U.S. of creating an "Asian NATO." The UNC, which monitors the border between North and South Korea, now includes Germany as part of its commitment to defending South Korea. North Korean officials argue that this move revives an outdated mandate and will escalate regional tensions. German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius emphasized that Berlin views this participation as integral to linking European security with the Indo-Pacific region. North Korea has warned of potential consequences due to the increased foreign military presence.

### U.S. and Australia Discuss China AUKUS, and Middle East in AUSMIN Talks

The United States and Australia have launched their annual AUSMIN talks in Annapolis, Maryland, focusing on China's "coercive behavior," the AUKUS nuclear submarine project, and escalating tensions in the Middle East. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin emphasized the need to address shared security challenges, including China's military activities and Russia's actions in Ukraine. Discussions also touched on the U.S. Marine rotational force expansion in northern Australia and defense cooperation.

The AUKUS agreement, involving the sale of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, has bipartisan support in the U.S. Additionally, both nations are collaborating on climate change and critical mineral supply chains.

## August 7

---

### Namal Rajapaksa Announces Presidential Bid Amid Sri Lanka's Crisis

Namal Rajapaksa, son of former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, will run in the September 21 presidential election against incumbent Ranil Wickremesinghe. Elected in July 2022, Wickremesinghe has managed Sri Lanka through its worst financial crisis in decades. Namal Rajapaksa, a parliamentarian and SLPP party member, acknowledged his candidacy as a late decision but is determined to gain grassroots support. Despite family ties to former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the ongoing economic challenges, including debt restructuring and an IMF bailout, Namal Rajapaksa aims to support economic recovery, job creation, and small business growth.

### Indonesia Opens Major EV Anode Material Plant with Chinese and Singaporean Investment

On Wednesday, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo inaugurated a new plant in Kendal, Central Java, built by China's BTR New Material Group and Singapore's Stellar Investment. The \$478 million facility will produce 80,000 metric tons of anode materials annually for electric vehicle (EV) batteries. This plant marks a significant step in Indonesia's strategy to develop a domestic EV industry, leveraging its rich nickel resources. The second phase of construction, set to begin later this year, will double the plant's capacity to 160,000 tons. The project is expected to position Indonesia as a major global producer of anode materials.

## August 8

---

### North Korean Delegation to Attend Russian Military Forum

A North Korean military delegation will attend a military-technical forum in Moscow from August 12-14, according to Russian state-run agency RIA Novosti. This marks increased cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

August 9

## Philippine Court Reinstates License of Maria Ressa's Rappler



Philippine Nobel laureate Maria Ressa's news website Rappler won a crucial appeal to restore its corporate license after the Court of Appeals overturned a 2018 decision by the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to shut down the media company. The court ruled that the SEC had overstepped its authority in revoking Rappler's license for alleged violations of foreign equity restrictions. Rappler had faced intense scrutiny under former President Rodrigo Duterte for its critical reporting. Ressa, who continues to face other legal challenges, hailed the ruling as a "vindication" after years of harassment.

## Philippines and Vietnam Hold First Joint Coast Guard Exercises Amid South China Sea Tensions



The coast guards of the Philippines and Vietnam conducted their first joint exercises on Friday, simulating search and rescue operations, firefighting, and medical response. The drills, involving Vietnam's ship CSB 8002 and the Philippine patrol vessel BRP Gabriela Silang, took place amid ongoing territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. Both nations face frequent confrontations with Beijing, which claims nearly the entire sea. The exercises highlight growing cooperation among countries concerned about Chinese activities in the region. Philippine officials emphasized the humanitarian focus of the drills and expressed hopes for future collaborations.

August 10

## Deadly Drone Attack on Rohingya Civilians Fleeing Myanmar

A drone attack in Myanmar's Rakhine state has killed dozens of Rohingya civilians, including families with children, as they tried to cross into Bangladesh. Witnesses described the harrowing aftermath, with survivors searching through piles of bodies to identify their loved ones. The attack, allegedly carried out by the Arakan Army, has been described as the deadliest assault on civilians during recent conflicts between junta forces and rebels. Videos from the scene show a devastating toll, though the exact number of casualties remains unverified. Survivors recount the horror of the attack, which left entire families shattered.

## Australia Successfully Test-Fires Advanced SM-6 Missile

Australia has successfully test-fired a Raytheon SM-6 missile from the HMAS Sydney, marking a significant advancement in its naval air defense capabilities. The test, conducted during the Pacific Dragon 2024 exercise near Hawaii, is part of Australia's efforts to integrate the advanced missile system into its naval arsenal. The SM-6, the most advanced in the U.S. naval air defense inventory, can target ballistic missiles, ships, ground targets, and aircraft. This milestone aligns with Australia's National Defence Strategy, aimed at enhancing military capabilities amid rising tensions with China. The missiles will be deployed on Australia's Hobart-class destroyers.

## Contributors

Debi Karmakar

Research Assistant at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)  
debi@cgs-bd.com

Bahauddin Ahmed

Digital Coordinator at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)  
bahauddin@cgs-bd.com

 Centre for  
Governance Studies