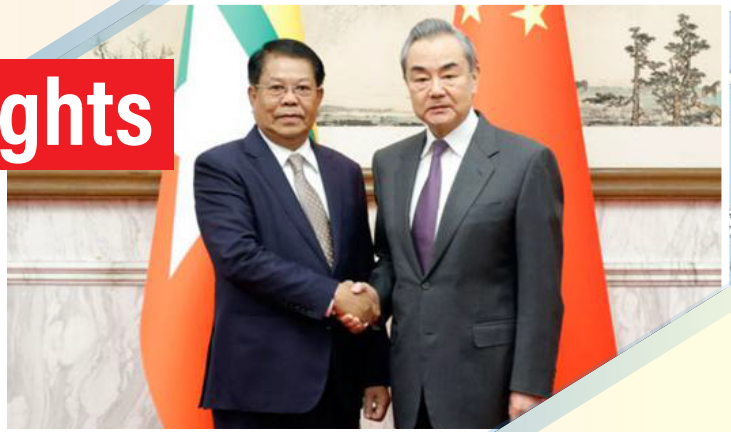


11 December | 2023

# Indo-Pacific Insights

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



## A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

### December 1

#### Philippines Strengthens South China Sea Presence with New Coast Guard Station



The Philippines has inaugurated a coast guard station on Thitu, a contested island in the South China Sea, enhancing its monitoring capabilities amid rising tensions over territorial disputes. The three-storey facility, equipped with advanced technology such as radar and satellite communication, aims to track Chinese vessels and aircraft in the disputed region. The move comes in response to recent sightings of a Chinese navy ship and militia vessels around Thitu. The Philippines, facing Beijing's territorial claims, views this outpost as strategically crucial. The South China Sea remains a focal point of contention, with multiple nations asserting sovereignty in the busy waterway.

### November 29

#### India to Investigate U.S. Security Concerns on Sikh Leader Plot

India has announced a formal investigation into security concerns raised by the United States regarding its alleged links to a thwarted plot to assassinate Sikh separatist leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The investigation, initiated in response to a warning from the White House, comes at a critical juncture for India-U.S. relations amid shared challenges from an assertive China. The Indian foreign ministry emphasized the seriousness of such inputs on national security, pledging necessary follow-up actions. The issue was reportedly discussed during the recent 2+2 dialogue, highlighting the ongoing diplomatic dialogue between the two nations. The concerns echo earlier accusations from Canada regarding Indian involvement in the murder of another Sikh separatist.

## December 3

### India Agrees to Withdraw Troops from Maldives as President Reorients Foreign Policy



India's government has reportedly agreed to withdraw its soldiers from the Maldives, according to President Mohamed Muizzu. Elected in September on a platform advocating a shift from the Maldives's "India first" policy, Muizzu stated that the Indian government has committed to removing the small contingent of around 75 personnel. The decision follows discussions during the COP28 climate summit, with both nations also agreeing to establish a high-level committee to address development project-related issues. India provides military equipment, disaster response assistance, and is involved in constructing a naval dockyard in the Maldives. The move comes amid regional influence dynamics, with the coalition supporting Muizzu perceived to have closer ties to China.

### ISIS Claims Responsibility for Deadly Bombing at Philippines Catholic Mass



Islamic State militants have asserted responsibility for a fatal bombing during a Catholic Mass in the Philippines, resulting in at least four deaths and 50 injuries. The attack transpired in a university gymnasium in Marawi, a city previously besieged by Islamist militants in 2017. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr condemned the "heinous acts" before ISIS claimed responsibility. Pope Francis expressed prayers for the victims, urging a turn from violence.

Security measures were heightened, and Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro assured the pursuit of justice. Fragments of a 60-mm mortar were found, indicating a potential foreign element. Ongoing investigations aim to uncover the attack's motives.

## December 4

### U.S. Delegation Acknowledges India's Probe into Alleged Assassination Plot

White House Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer led a U.S. delegation to New Delhi, acknowledging India's establishment of an investigative panel to probe an alleged plot to assassinate a Sikh separatist on U.S. soil. The U.S. Justice Department accused an Indian government official of directing the unsuccessful plot, leading to charges against an individual. The delicate issue comes amid efforts to strengthen ties between India and the Biden administration, as both nations address shared concerns, including an ascendant China. The meeting also covered developments in the Middle East, addressing the Israel-Hamas conflict and Red Sea vessel attacks.

### South Korea Launches Solid-Fuel Rocket Amid Space Race with North Korea



South Korea marked a significant achievement in its space endeavors with the successful launch of a solid-fuel rocket carrying a civilian-purpose satellite near Jeju Island. This event, the third successful test following milestones in March and December 2022, showcased technology developed by the state-run Agency for Defense Development and featured a booster and satellite by Hanwha Systems. The satellite, aimed at applications like environmental monitoring, transmitted signals to the ground control center. This success enhances South Korea's surveillance capabilities, contrasting with North Korea's recent launch of a military spy satellite, condemned internationally for violating U.N. security resolutions. The global space race intensifies, with North Korea criticizing perceived "double standards" and vowing to bolster its aerospace surveillance capabilities.



## December 6

### China Sends Fighters to Monitor U.S. Navy Patrol Near Taiwan Strait



China's military dispatched fighter jets to monitor and warn a U.S. Navy patrol aircraft flying over the Taiwan Strait, claiming sovereignty over the region. The U.S. Navy's P-8A Poseidon aircraft flew over the strait in international airspace, emphasizing the commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. China's military described the flight as "public hype" and asserted it would deal with such situations according to laws and regulations. With Taiwan preparing for elections on Jan. 13, tensions remain high, and China has framed the choice as one between war and peace.

### China Urges National Reconciliation in Myanmar, Seeks Anti-Fraud Cooperation

Chinese diplomat Wang Yi expressed hope for Myanmar's swift national reconciliation and political transformation during a meeting with Myanmar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Than Swe. Wang emphasized strengthening law enforcement cooperation to combat telecom fraud, a shared concern for both nations. China has been cracking down on fraud syndicates in Myanmar accused of swindling Chinese nationals. Acknowledging recent successes in joint efforts, Wang urged continued collaboration to eradicate online gambling and telecom fraud, signaling China's commitment to law enforcement cooperation amid Myanmar's internal challenges and political developments.

## December 7

### U.S. Defense Spending Bill Nearing Approval for Nuclear Submarine Sale to Australia

Australia's government is optimistic as a U.S. defense spending bill, authorizing the sale of three nuclear submarines as part of the AUKUS pact, seems set to pass Congress after a bipartisan compromise. Valued at \$244 billion over three decades, AUKUS aims to develop nuclear-powered submarines and advanced weapons. Defence Minister Richard Marles expressed hope for a "once in a generation change," anticipating the first U.S. submarine sale to Australia within the next decade. AUKUS, fostering a seamless defense industrial base, plans to share nuclear-propulsion technology for a new submarine class to be built in Australia and Britain by 2040.

### China-EU Summit Addresses Trade Imbalance, But Differences Persist



At their first in-person summit in four years, China and the European Union acknowledged the need for a more balanced trade relationship but showed no sign of resolving differences. EU leaders pressed China over their trade deficit and unfair competition concerns, while China urged prudence from the EU in adopting restrictive trade policies. The EU emphasized the need for reciprocal actions from China to enhance market access. Despite discussions on medical devices and cross-border data flows, fundamental differences, including China's influence on Russia amid the Ukraine war, remain. While managing differences, the summit did not bring about fundamental economic or political changes.

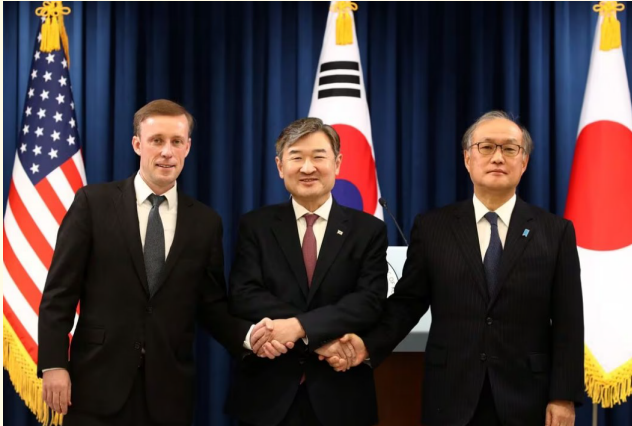
## December 8

### ADB and JICA Launch \$1.5 Billion Fund for Asia-Pacific Private Infrastructure

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) announced the creation of the Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund 2 (LEAP 2), with up to \$1.5 billion in capital from JICA. The fund aims to boost private infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region, countering China's increasing investments. LEAP 2 succeeds the initial LEAP fund. The launch, a week before Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's ASEAN summit, signals Japan's commitment to developing Asia. The fund will prioritize projects in India, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam, focusing on carbon reduction, healthcare, education, and agriculture. LEAP's predecessor co-financed 35 projects across 14 countries.

## December 9

### U.S., South Korea, and Japan Collaborate on Cybersecurity Initiatives Against North Korea



National security advisers from the United States, South Korea, and Japan met in Seoul to address North Korea's cybersecurity threats, including cryptocurrency abuses and space launches. The discussions, following the August Camp David summit, aim to deepen security and economic cooperation. The nations announced trilateral initiatives targeting cybercrime, cryptocurrency money laundering, and space and ballistic missile tests by North Korea. The focus includes countering economic coercion, with completed work on a supply-chain early warning system. The meeting underscores unity against China's influence and commitment to peace in the Taiwan Strait and navigation in the East and South China Seas.

## December 10

### Tensions Escalate as Chinese Fighter Jets Breach Taiwan Strait's Median Line

Taiwan reported a provocative move by 12 Chinese fighter jets crossing the sensitive median line in the Taiwan Strait, heightening tensions just a month before the island's presidential election. The defence ministry revealed the breach, while also noting a suspected Chinese weather balloon crossing the strait. Taiwan's Defence Minister considered it likely a weather balloon but emphasized the obligation to report. As election-related interference concerns grow, Vice President Lai Ching-te leads in polls, facing criticism from China. Taiwan's Foreign Minister accused China of blatant interference, anticipating further attempts as the election approaches. China's response remains awaited.

## Surge in Rohingya Arrivals Continues in Indonesia



Approximately 400 ethnic Rohingya, escaping persecution in Myanmar, arrived in Indonesia's Aceh province, adding to the recent influx of the Muslim minority. The UNHCR reported that 1,200 Rohingya had landed in Indonesia since November. Two dilapidated boats carrying an estimated 200 each landed in Pidie and Aceh Besar districts. President Joko Widodo suspects human trafficking and pledges collaboration with international organizations. Although Indonesia is not a UN refugee convention signatory, it historically accommodates refugees. The escalating arrivals, however, have triggered social media backlash and local resistance in Aceh. The Rohingya often undertake perilous sea journeys between November and April.

## December 11

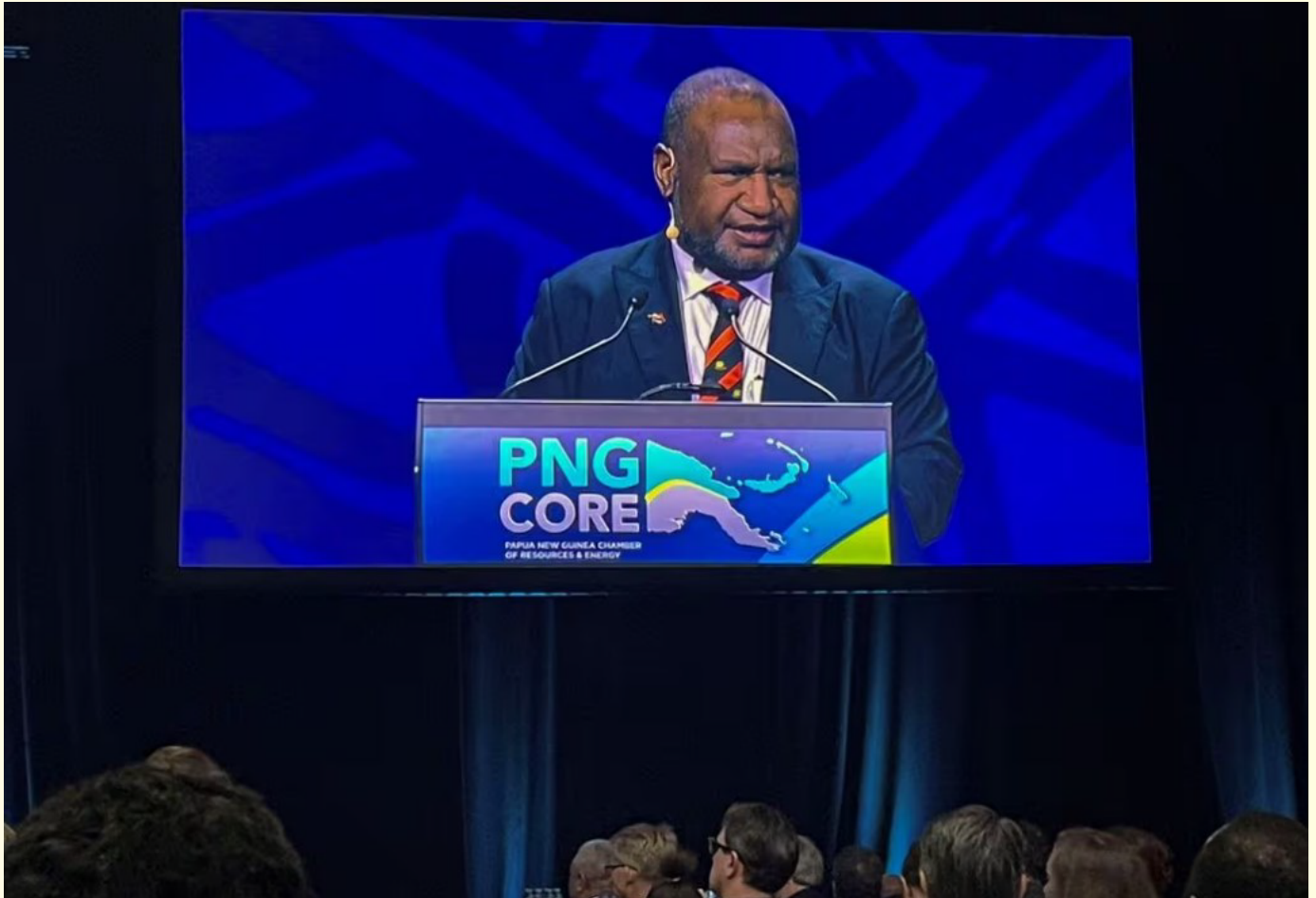
### The Philippines Summons the Chinese Ambassador



Amid rising tensions in the South China Sea, the Philippines condemned China's actions against its vessels on resupply missions, including one carrying a senior military official. Accusations include repeated water cannon firings and deliberate ramming, causing significant damage. The Philippines filed diplomatic protests, summoning China's ambassador and deeming the actions a threat to peace. This escalation follows recent talks between Philippine and Chinese leaders, revealing a disconnect between dialogue and actions. The U.S. reiterated support for the Philippines and condemned China's interference, while China accused external forces of instigation without specifying.



## Papua New Guinea's PM Clarifies Security Talks amid Global Power Shifts



Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister, James Marape, emphasized that the nation had not engaged in security discussions with China, despite recent agreements with Australia and the United States. The country, positioned as a buffer between Asia and the Pacific, signed a security deal with Australia, focusing on internal security. Marape highlighted the importance of improved security for foreign investors and mentioned ongoing talks on a free trade agreement with China. Additionally, he asserted Papua New Guinea's commitment to addressing poverty and advocated for economic investment over mere security concerns, positioning the country strategically amidst global shifts.

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