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CONTENTS

MAPPING EAST ASIA

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| CHINA | 3 |
| TAIWAN | 5 |
| JAPAN | 7 |
| THE KOREAN PENINSULA | 10 |

CHINA

Chinese PLA (Navy) Joint Military Exercise: Pakistan and Singapore

The Chinese People Liberation Army (PLA) Navy participated in the Multinational Maritime Exercise AMAN-21 from 11-16 February, 2021 in Karachi, Pakistan. The objective of the exercise was to “provide a medium to develop doctrinal synergy to tackle maritime security challenges and to enhance interoperability amongst navies at different pedestals of the technological prowess to come together and secure a sustainable maritime environment.”¹ For the six-day exercise, the Chinese navy used the guided-missile destroyer *Guiyang* (Hull 119), the missile frigate *Zaozhuang* (Hull 542) and the comprehensive supply ship *Dongpinghu* (Hull 960).

Describing the outcome of this exercise, the commander of the PLA Navy (PLAN) fleet, Wan Jun stated that “the exercise served to strengthen the PLAN’s professional exchanges and friendly interactions with navies of other countries, and improve their capability to respond to multiple security threats and safeguard maritime peace of the region.”² Meanwhile, on the prospects of cooperation between Chinese and Pakistani navies, in an exclusive interview with *Global Times*, Pakistan’s Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Amjad Khan Niazi stated that the Pakistan Navy and PLA Navy “enjoy long-standing, broad-ranging and strengthening bilateral relationship” where

collaboration between the two navies exists across multiple domains such as in “acquisition of platforms, equipment, bilateral exercises, technical cooperation, navy-to-navy expert level staff talks, training collaboration, exchange visits and port calls.” Admiral Niazi also underlined that “both navies remain committed to expanding and consolidating this relationship for regional peace and good order at sea.”³

AMAN-21 is the 7th Exercise of the AMAN series. Forty-Five countries including the United States, Russia and some NATO member-countries participated in the exercise with their naval warships, aircraft, special Operation Forces and a large number of observers.

On 24 February, the 36th Chinese naval escort task forces held a joint naval exercise with the Singapore Navy. The objective of the exercise was mainly to practice training subjects among the fleet formations such as rendezvous manoeuvre and separation of the ships, as well as joint search and rescue operations.⁴

China Successfully Conducts UAV WJ-700 and Land-based Missiles Interception Test

The China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC) successfully conducted the maiden flight of its unmanned air vehicle (UAV), WJ-700, on 11 January. The WJ-700 is characterized by high altitude, high speed and high payload capability. Moreover, it can perform a wide range of tasks on risky battlefields, including air-

¹ “7th Multinational Maritime Exercise Aman-2021 –The Mega Event of Pakistan Navy Commences with flags hoisting ceremony” *Press Release, ISPR*, February 12, 2021 at <https://ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail.php?id=6048> (Accessed on March 12, 2021)

² “Chinese naval fleet wraps up joint exercise ‘Peace-21’ in Pakistan” *China Military*, March 18 2021 at http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-02/18/content_9987129.htm (Accessed on March 12, 2021)

³ “Pakistani, Chinese navies play important roles in maintaining maritime order of Indian Ocean: Exclusive with Pakistan Navy chief” *Global Time* February 4, 2021 at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1214952.shtml> (Accessed on March 12, 2021)

⁴ “China, Singapore hold joint naval exercise”, *China Military*, February 24, 2021 at http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-02/24/content_9991205.htm (Accessed on March 12, 2021)

to-ground standoff strikes, air-to-surface precision strikes, as well as wide-area surveillance.⁵ Moreover, China also conducted a land-based, mid-course missiles interception successfully on 8 February. The system contains a long- distance monitoring radar, early warning satellites, high-accuracy distance measurement, false object identifying, as well as battlefield management systems, among other things.⁶ Only a few countries such as the United States, Japan and China have conducted such tests.

Chinese PLA Medical Team Wins Accolade

Recognizing the Chinese PLA medical team, particularly their heroic fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cambodian Defence Ministry on 18 January, awarded ‘Peace Knight Medals’ to the 15th medical team of the Chinese PLA.⁷ Also, on 16 January, the Command of the Ecuadorian Army awarded the ‘Star of the Armed Forces’ to the 15th medical team of the Chinese PLA for assisting Ecuador in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸

China’s Response to US Congress’ ‘National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021’

On 1 January 2021 the US Congress passed the ‘National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021. One of the salient features of this Act

is the imposition costs on China and establishing the ‘Pacific Deterrence Initiative’ in order to deter potential threats from China by continuing to sell arms to Taiwan.⁹ Reacting to this bill by the US Congress, the Chinese Defence Ministry spokesperson, Senior Col. Ren Guoqiang affirmed that it was “gross interference in China internal affairs as well as a major breach of the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiques.”¹⁰ The Chinese spokesperson further pointed out that “China is always committed to peaceful development, upholds a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security...” wherein in recent years, the Chinese PLA has provided “more public security goods to the international community” such as in UN Peacekeeping operations, and actively carried out anti-pandemic international cooperation.

Tensions Rise in South China Sea as Chinese Coast Guards Sail near the Senkaku Islands

Ever since China passed the new law on 1st February, that allows Chinese coast guards to open fire on and seize vessels that try to enter Chinese waters illegally, tensions between China and Japan have escalated around the Senkaku Islands.

According to Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato, Chinese coast guard ships were spotted in the disputed area for 26 days in one month. With

⁵ “China’s WJ-700 UAV makes maiden flight”, *China Military*, January 13, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-01/13/content_9967223.htm (Accessed on March 16, 2021)

⁶ “Interception capability strengthens defense shield”, *China Military*, February 8, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-02/08/content_9983213.htm (Accessed on March 16, 2021)

⁷ “Cambodia awards Chinese military doctors ‘Peace Knight Medals’”, *China Military*, February 19, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-01/19/content_9970456.htm (Accessed on March 21, 2021)

⁸ “Ecuador awards Chinese military doctors ‘Star of the Armed Forces’”, *China Military*, February 18, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-01/18/content_9969692.htm (Accessed 21 March 2021)

⁹ “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021” 116th Congress, United States Senate Committee on Armed Services at <https://www.congress.gov/116/crpt/srpt236/CRPT-116srpt236.pdf> (Accessed on March 21, 2021)

¹⁰ “China opposes adverse provisions in US defense act, lodges solemn representations: Defense spokesperson” *Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China*, January 5, 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-01/05/content_4876565.htm (Accessed on March 20, 2021)

Japan also modifying and reinterpreting its law and allowing its coast guards to open fire on invaders the issues can be considered serious and “it’s necessary to continue watching the situation with a sense of tension” said Kato at a news conference.

TAIWAN

The US’ National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)

The United States House of Representatives passed the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) with a majority 335-78. Two sections of the NDAA exclusively deal with Taiwan. Its Section 1260 “reiterates that the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances provided by the U.S. to Taiwan in 1982 are ‘the foundation for United States-Taiwan relations’.” It obligates the US Secretary of State “to make an annual briefing to Congress on U.S. arms sales to Taiwan within 45 days of the bill’s passage.” It also stipulates that the US Secretary of Defense “must brief Congress within 180 days of the bill’s passage on the feasibility of establishing a medical security partnership with Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense.” Section 9724 of the NDAA calls on the US government “to ensure that Taiwanese nationals do not face discrimination when seeking employment at international financial institutions, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund.” The bill “allocates US\$ 2.235 billion to the US Department of Defense for the establishment of a ‘Pacific Deterrence Initiative’.”

The media noted that although this does exclusively pertain to Taiwan, Taiwan may benefit the Deterrence Initiative as well.¹¹

The US Arms Deals for Taiwan during the Closing Months of the Trump Presidency

The Trump administration had cleared many important arms deals for Taiwan in its closing months. The Trump administration cleared and notified the sale to Taiwan of a Field Information Communications System (FICS) and related equipment at an estimated cost of US\$ 280 million” to Congress in early December. It has been informed that “The system consists of 154 Communications Nodes with S-788 Type III shelter[s], 24 Communication Relays with S-788 Type III shelter[s], 8 Network Management Systems with S-788 Type III shelter[s], as well as other related equipment and technical and logistical support.”¹²

In November 2020, the Trump administration notified Congress of its approval of “the sale of \$600 million in armed MQ-9B drones and related equipment to Taiwan.”¹³ The arms deal will approximately cost US\$ 600 million for Taiwan. The media noted that “The drone is capable of linking with satellite communications shared among US allies, meaning that Taiwan and its US counterparts could instantly share battlefield intelligence, providing opportunities for the two sides to cooperate during a conflict.”¹⁴ It in particular enhances Taiwan’s long-term long-range

¹¹ Chiang Chin-yeh and Matthew Mazzetta, “US House Passes Defense Bill with Provisions Supporting Taiwan”, *Focus Taiwan*, December 09, 2020 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202012090009> (Accessed on February 03, 2021).

¹² Chiang Chin-yeh and Emerson Lim, “U.S. Announces Sale of Military Communications System to Taiwan”, *Focus Taiwan*, December 08, 2020 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202012080006> (Accessed on February 03, 2021).

¹³ Matthew Lee, “US Approves Armed MQ-9B Drones Purchase by Taiwan”, *Defense News*, November 04, 2020 at <https://www.defensenews.com/unmanned/2020/11/04/us-approves-armed-mq-9b-drones-purchase-by-taiwan/> (Accessed on February 03, 2021).

¹⁴ “Drone Sale could Lead to Intelligence Sharing”, *Taipei Times*, November 07, 2020 at <https://taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/11/07/2003746524> (Accessed on February 03, 2021).

surveillance capabilities. It “could fly near Chinese vessels to provide critical intelligence for the US to target them.”¹⁵

The approved Drone sale was the 10th arms transfer decision under Trump. The media learnt that this was “the first such sale since the Trump administration loosened export rules for the sale of military drones.” The US in recent years under Trump cleared the sale of weapon platforms such as “long-range precision-strike capabilities, including the AGM-84H Standoff Land Attack Missile Expanded Response Missiles, High Mobility Artillery Rocket System rocket launchers, Army Tactical Missile System M57 Unitary Missiles and Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems.” These missiles and Taiwan’s Hsiung Feng II and III missiles have the capabilities to hit the targets in Chinese coastal provinces within a range 250 km. Other platforms in the recent sales to Taiwan included “MX-20 Multi-Spectral Targeting Systems and spares, SeaVue Maritime Multi-Role Patrol Radars, and SAGE 750 Electronic Surveillance Measures Systems, C-Band Line-of-Sight Ground Data Terminals, personnel training and training equipment.” The media has drawn this information and analysis from Hsieh Pei-shiue’s article available at the website of the Institute for National Defense and Security Research.¹⁶

Taiwan’s Indigenous UAV

Taiwan’s own “long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)” is expected to be “go into

production by 2024.” The drone, named Teng Yun, was reported to be “still in the system integration process, with many critical parts such as its radar, being manufactured locally... [and] Air Force also has to make a series of operational evaluations before the Teng Yun can enter full production.” Vice Defense Minister Chang Che-ping provided this information during a legislative hearing in Taiwan’s parliament.¹⁷

Taiwan-US Diplomatic Cooperation

On November 17, 2020, Taiwan and the US deliberated about “plans to jointly invest in overseas infrastructure.” Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs Chen Chern-chyi had a virtual interaction with Mitchell Silk, U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Markets, on this theme. They discussed “potential infrastructure investments in America and Southeast Asia.” The meeting was held under the cooperation agreement Taiwan and the US had signed in September “to identify and establish markets for infrastructure and energy in their respective regions, the Ministry said.” Clean 5G network development, global healthcare, supply chain security, energy development and infrastructure investment were part of the deliberations.¹⁸ It should be noted that in recent years under the watch of Trump and Tsai, the two sides have taken their economic cooperation to Taiwan’s diplomatic allies and other countries. This development is important as it is in line with the US efforts for strengthening Taiwan’s *de facto* independence through various military and diplomatic instruments.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Wang Cheng-chung and Ko Lin, “Taiwan-made UAV to Enter Production by 2024: Vice Defense Minister”, *Focus Taiwan*, November 19, 2020 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202011190008> (Accessed on February 03, 2021).

¹⁸ Liang Pei-chi and Matthew Mazzetta, “Taiwan, U.S. Hold Talks on Overseas Infrastructure Finance”, *Focus Taiwan*, November 18, 2020 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/business/202011180022> (Accessed on February 03, 2021).

Keeping with the trends in US relations with Taiwan under the Trump administration, a US congressional panel “called for the status of the director of the de facto US embassy in Taiwan to be upgraded to a level on par with an ambassador.” This recommendation was made in the annual report to Congress by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC). The USCC is “a bipartisan group that monitors, investigates, and reports on the national security implications of Sino-US relations.” The report recommended “Congress to assess opportunities to strengthen economic cooperation with Taiwan in key areas.”¹⁹

JAPAN

Quad Ministerial Meeting held

On 18 February, the third India-Australia-Japan-US Quad Ministerial Meeting was held. External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar discussed regional security challenges and the need to uphold a rules-based international order, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, rule of law, freedom of navigation in the international seas and peaceful resolution of disputes with his counterparts Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The developing situation in Myanmar was also discussed. A key plank of the meeting was the mutuality of strategic interests in advancing a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific with ASEAN’s centrality at the core. Furthermore,

Europe’s greater involvement in the Indo-Pacific also featured in the discussions. Key areas of cooperation include enhancing access to affordable COVID-19 vaccines, maritime security, HADR, supply-chain resilience and counter-terrorism.²⁰

India-Japan Advance Cooperation in ICT

On 15 January, India and Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on Information and Communication Technologies. The aim is to advance development of technologies related to 5G, telecom security, submarine optical fibre cables, spectrum management and smart cities.²¹ Union Minister for Communication, Electronics and Information Technology, Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad underscored the opportunities India presents for Japanese investors in the field of 5G, Internet of Things, and digital health technologies. He argued that owing to PLI and SPECS, India attracted investments in electronics manufacturing, and further encouraged Japanese electronics industry to invest in India.

India-Japan push for “Specified Skilled Worker”

On 18 January, India and Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on a Basic Framework for Partnership for Proper Operation of the System Pertaining to “Specified Skilled Worker”.²² The aim is to set up a framework for information-sharing and consultation to facilitate

¹⁹ “Congressional Panel Proposes Upgrading US Envoy to Taiwan to Ambassador Level”, *Taiwan News*, December 02, 2020 at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4067368> (Accessed on February 03, 2021).

²⁰ “3rd India-Australia-Japan-USA Quad Ministerial Meeting”, MEA, 18 February, 2021 at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33540/3rd+indiaaustraliajapanusa+quad+ministerial+meeting>, Accessed on February 27, 2021.

²¹ “India and Japan Sign MoU to Enhance Cooperation in the Field of ICT, Ministry of Communications”, 15 January 2021 at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1688812> Accessed on February 27, 2021.

²² “Cabinet approves signing of Memorandum of Cooperation between India and Japan on Partnership in ‘Specified Skilled Worker’”, 6 January 2021 at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1686463> Accessed on February 27, 2021.

mobility of workers and skilled professionals who have the required qualification and language proficiency. Those who qualify as specified skilled workers can stay and work in Japan for up to five years. Fourteen sectors have been identified, including nursing care, the material processing industry, the industrial machinery manufacturing industry, the electric and electronic information-related industry, the construction, shipbuilding and ship-related industry, the automobile maintenance, aviation, lodging, building cleaning, agriculture, fisheries, food and beverages manufacturing industry and the food service industry.

India-Japan Act East with focus on Assam

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and Ambassador Satoshi Suzuki visited Guwahati with the objective of advancing India-Japan cooperation in the Northeast, especially realising the potential of Assam as the springboard in India's Act East policy.²³ Dr. Jaishankar situated the India-Japan strategic partnership at the centre of India's national modernization and economic development efforts. Japan has emerged as a key partner for India in navigating the opportunities that the network of production, consumption, resources and markets in Asia presents. In this regard, regional connectivity and infrastructure is important to advance economic vitality, and Assam is the bridge between India and its Eastern neighbours.

The aim is to build robust connectivity to and within Assam, and extend it to the rest of the Northeast, and further strengthen the linkage with Myanmar and Bangladesh, and all the way to Vietnam and Japan. Assam is important in

connecting the Himalayas with the Bay of Bengal via inland water connectivity to key ports like Chittagong and Mongla. Japanese ODA is pivotal in building the 20 km-long bridge on the Brahmaputra, between Dhubri (Assam) and Phulbari (Meghalaya). Tokyo has deepened its relations with Assam through several projects, including prospects of building Japanese Industrial Townships, capacity-building in water supply, sewage treatment, disaster management, urban planning, agriculture and fisheries.

Japan Highly Concerned with Chinese Coast Guard Law

Japan is highly concerned as the 25th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) adopted a new Chinese Coast Guard law.²⁴ The 19th Article of the draft allows the Coast Guard to "take all necessary measures, including the use of weapons, when national sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction are being illegally infringed upon by foreign organizations or individuals at sea". It also permits the Chinese Coast Guard to take down structures built by foreign countries in areas claimed by China. Japan has expressed concern that the law should not be employed in a way that violates international law. Japan's National Security Council is discussing ways to strengthen Tokyo's defences around the Senkaku Islands.

Sri Lanka walks back on the East Container Terminal commitment

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has confirmed that Sri Lanka does not have any intention to sell

²³ "Lecture by External Affairs Minister on Act East Policy and India-Japan cooperation in North East India with a special focus on Assam", MEA, 15 February 2021 at https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dt1/33523/Lecture_by_External_Affairs_Minister_on_Act_East_Policy_and_IndiaJapan_cooperation_in_North_East_India_with_a_special_focus_on_Assam Accessed on February 27, 2021.

²⁴ "Press Conference by Foreign Minister MOTEGI Toshimitsu", MOFA Japan, 22 January 2021 at https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken24e_000041 Accessed on February 27, 2021.

or lease any section of East Container Terminal (ECT) to foreign countries, and the operations will be solely conducted by the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA).²⁵ This comes after port trade unions protests in Sri Lanka. Following this development, Japan has expressed regret over the unilateral decision while India has urged that all sides should continue to abide by existing understanding and commitment. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in May 2019 between Sri Lanka, India and Japan to develop the ECT. While Sri Lanka retains 100 per cent ownership, a joint-ventured Terminal Operations Company with 51 per cent stake for Sri Lanka and 49 per cent for India and Japan, was agreed upon.

Subsequently, Sri Lanka's cabinet has confirmed that the West Container Terminal (WCT) at the Colombo Port will be developed as a joint venture between the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA), India's Adani Group and a Japanese company.²⁶ The Private Public Partnership (PPP) will be on a 15-85 per cent basis.

Japan to make Pilot-less Fighter Jets by 2035

Japan has taken first step towards developing unmanned aircrafts to deter the highly advanced Chinese military technologies.

Tokyo is currently outmanned and outgunned by China according to the Defense Ministry, which possess three times higher numbers of fighter jets than Japan. Under these circumstances Tokyo has decided to close this gap by developing and producing remote-controlled and unmanned jets in order to prepare itself for the rise of drone warfare.

The Ministry plans to introduce these jets in three stages, starting with the remote controlled ones, then moving to "teaming" operations which will have one manned plane controlling several drones and the final ones will be fully unmanned and autonomous.

The task of researching necessary technologies and developing AI technology has already been assigned to the companies. There are eight companies involved in the project as of now as talks are still underway with Lockheed Martin.

The cost of the programme is estimated to be \$40 billion, as Japan plans to deploy these next generation fighter jets as early as 2035.

Japan and United States' Agreement on Cost-Sharing of Hosting American Troops in Japanese Territory

A special one year agreement was finally reached after years of backroom negotiations between the previous governments of Japan and the U.S and threats from the U.S side to withdraw the troops if certain benchmarks weren't met. Japan has agreed to shoulder ¥200 billion in the one year agreement.

This agreement can be seen as a temporary measure, as both nations deal with the new strands of COVID-19 this temporary measure will give them more time to focus on their internal matters and vaccines etc. Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi stated that the talks for the new deal beyond April 2022 will continue and a decision on the length of new agreement will be taken during those talks.

²⁵ "Playing 'terminator' to the gallery", *Daily Mirror Online*, 2 February, 2021 at <http://www.dailymirror.lk/news-features/Playing-terminator-to-the-gallery/131-204947> Accessed on February 27, 2021.

²⁶ "West Container Terminal for SLPA, India and Japan: Keheliya", *Daily Mirror*, 3 March 2021 at http://www.dailymirror.lk/print/front_page/West-Container-Terminal-for-SLPA-India-and-Japan-Keheliya/238-206905 Accessed on March 7, 2021.

KOREAN PENINSULA

South Korea and United States' reach Agreement on the New Cost Sharing Deal on the American Troops Presence

The U.S and South Korea have reached a new agreement to share the cost of keeping American troops in the Korean Peninsula. After facing various roadblocks with the Trump administration which demanded South Korea pay five times more

than previously, this agreement has come as a big achievement for the Korean government as well as Biden administration towards efforts to make the Asia Pacific more stable. The new deal will help South Korea boost its contribution by 13.8 per cent.

South Korea currently keeps approximately 28,500 U.S troops on the Peninsula.

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* All the footnotes were verified at the time of publication.

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