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Editor

Opangmeren Jamir

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The year 2020 will go down in history as the year of the pandemic, where the entire human race have been affected by coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic. Nearly two millions lives were claimed by it while 10 million were infected. The world economy is hit severely and the fight against COVID-19 is far from over. But the announcement by the developers of several vaccines of excellent results in large trails from the start of December 2020 in which several countries have already rolled out vaccination efforts, gives a gleam of hope in battling against the pandemic.

In the midst of ongoing battle against the pandemic, the security environment of East Asia region, especially toward the end of the year, continued to experience conflict and competition and it will have long lasting impact in the region. For instance, apart from defence dialogue of December 2020 between China and European Union, China and Russia signed a protocol on the notification of a launching ballistic missiles. On the other hand, Japan and Taiwan continue to strengthen defence cooperation with its allies.

The East Asia Military Monitor focuses on the military and security development in the region, particularly in China, Japan, Taiwan and the Korean peninsula and tries to captures the events through brief news items for the month of November and December 2020.

Opangmeren Jamir

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MAPPING EAST ASIA

CHINA

China and Russia sign Protocol Agreement for Ballistic Missile and Carrier Rocket Launches

- Chinese Defence Minister, Wei Fenghe and Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu signed a protocol on the extension of the agreement signed on October 13, 2009, on the notifications of the launch of ballistic missiles and space missile carriers on December 15, 2020. Both sides announced extension of the Agreement for a period of 10 years and stressed that the two militaries would like to strengthen practical cooperation on this basis and further enrich the connotation of bilateral relations.

Describing the significance of extending the agreement, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated: “In the years the agreement has been active, it has proven to be efficient, facilitating further strengthening of mutual trust and ensuring that the relations between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China have become more open.” The Russian Foreign Ministry also stated that extending the agreement for another ten years only implies “the trusting nature of Russian-Chinese relations and helps maintain global security and stability.”¹ The Chinese National Defence Ministry spokesperson, Senior Col. Tan Kefie also reiterated that “by signing of the Agreement by the two sides in 2009 demonstrated a high degree of mutual trust between China and Russia” and extending an agreement only demonstrates “the high level and particularity of [the] China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination in the new era.”²

Security and Defence Dialogue between China and the European Union

- Strengthening security cooperation between China and the European Union (EU), the 11th round of the security and defence policy dialogue between the two sides was held on December 10, 2020 through video link. From the Chinese side, the Office for International Military Cooperation of China’s Central Military Commission, and from the EU, the Common Security and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) planning and crisis response of the European External Action Service, participated in the dialogue.

During the dialogue, both sides cherished the defence and security cooperation as an important component of China-EU relations. The EU especially commented that it is “willingly to intensify cooperation with China in areas such as international peacekeeping and maritime security and jointly play a positive role in maintaining international and regional security and stability”³

¹ "Russia-China deal on notifying of missile launches shows mutual trust, Moscow says" *TASS*, December 15, 2020 at <https://tass.com/politics/1235205> (Accessed on January 11, 2021)

² "China, Russia to jointly maintain global strategic stability: defense spokesperson" *Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China*, December 15, 2020 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-12/15/content_4875550.htm (Accessed on January 11, 2021).

³ "China, EU hold 11th security and defence policy dialogue" *China Military*, December 11, 2020 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-12/11/content_9951376.htm (Accessed on January 18, 2021).

It is to be noted that following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the EU and China in 1975, the relationship between the two sides has been fruitful in several areas. In particular, the creation of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2003 has deepened and broadened cooperation in a wide range of areas, and the EU and China have become highly interdependent as a result.

On June 9, 2020, at the 10th round of the China-EU high-level strategic dialogue, Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi and the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, had an in-depth exchange of views on non-proliferation, the Iranian nuclear issue, the Korean Peninsula, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and the Middle East Peace Process.⁴ On the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Josep Borrell confirmed that both the EU and China “agree that the embargo was taken at a certain moment with a certain time schedule.” Further, he added that “the United States have withdrawn from the JCPOA and now they cannot claim that they are still part of it in order to deal with this issue from the JCPOA agreement.”⁵

China's Proposals at Foreign Ministers' Meeting on JCPOA

- With the European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell in the Chair, the foreign ministers of Iran, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China and Russia participated to discuss the latest developments on JCPOA, on December 21, 2020.

In the meeting, Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi proposed making a ‘relentless efforts’ to uphold the JCPOA even in the face of ‘maximum pressure’ from the Trump administration; pushing for an early effort for the US to return to the JCPOA without any ‘pre-conditions’ as soon as possible; resolving the compliance issues ‘fairly and impartially’ and establishing a ‘multilateral dialogue framework’ in the Gulf region to discuss regional security issues in the context of the JCPOA.⁶

Subsequently, after the meeting, a joint statement was issued, which declared “that full and effective implementation of the JCPOA by all remains crucial and discussed the need to address ongoing implementation challenges, including on nuclear non-proliferation and sanctions lifting commitments” and also re-emphasized that the deal, enshrined in Resolution 2231 of the United Nations Security Council, as a “key element” in the global non-proliferation regime and a diplomatic achievement contributing to regional and international peace.⁷

⁴ “China, EU tenth round of high-level strategic dialogue” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, June 9, 2020 at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1787687.shtml (Accessed on January 18, 2021).

⁵ “EU-China Strategic Dialogue: Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference”, *European Union External Action Service*, June 9, 2020 at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/80639/eu-china-strategic-dialogue-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-press_zh-hans (Accessed on January 10, 2021).

⁶ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on December 22, 2020”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, December 22, 2020 at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1841988.shtml (Accessed on January 10, 2021).

⁷ “Joint Ministerial Statement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”, *European Union External Action Service*, December 21, 2020 at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90907/joint-ministerial-statement-joint-comprehensive-plan-action_en (Accessed on January 21, 2021).

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, was agreed upon in Vienna on July 14, 2015, between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – China, France, Russia, the UK and the US plus Germany, together with the European Union.

China's Response to the Report 'NATO 2030'

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in a study report by experts, titled 'NATO 2030: United for New Era' released on November 2020 in Brussels, has outlined several security challenges, including recommendations to face new security challenges.⁸

Though Russia remains a major threat to NATO, the report recommended that NATO should continue to pursue the 'dual-track' approach of 'deterrence' and 'dialogue' with Russia. Nevertheless, the report also portrayed China as a potential military threat, wherein it stated that, "NATO must devote much more time, political resources, and action to the security challenges posed by China – based on an assessment of its national capabilities, economic heft, and the stated ideological goals of its leaders. It needs to develop a political strategy for approaching a world in which China will be of growing importance through to 2030."

To this end, several recommendations were made in the report, such as: Increasing information-sharing analysis on China within the Alliance; Continual efforts to build resilience and counter cyber-attacks and disinformation that originate in China; efforts should be made to assess the implications of China's technology capability development for Allies' security; investment should be made in its ability to monitor and defend against any Chinese activities that could impact collective defence, military readiness and/or resilience in Supreme Allied Commander Europe's (SACEUR's) Area of Responsibility; Upholding NATO's cohesion when Allies engage China bilaterally and through formats such as the 17+1 and Belt and Road Initiative.

Reacting to the NATO report, the spokesperson of China's Ministry of National Defense, Senior Col. Tan Kefei repudiated it, stating "China upholds a defence policy that is defensive in nature, and maintains a shared, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security view." He added that China is hoping that "various parties can correct their prejudice and have a rational view of China and China's military development."⁹ Meanwhile, the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of National Defense also prompted that China "believe[s] the South China Sea should not become a battleground for big power competition, or a sea full of roaming warships."¹⁰ This statement came following the report that UK's Royal Navy will deploy its new aircraft carrier, the *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and its strike group will patrol the South China Sea in 2021.

⁸ "NATO 2030: United for a New Era", *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, November 24, 2020 at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf (Accessed on January 21, 2021).

⁹ "NATO report on China's rise a threat is baseless, false: National Defense Ministry", *Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China*, December 31, 2020 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-12/31/content_4876314.htm (Accessed on January 19, 2021).

¹⁰ Ibid.

China Adopts the Revised ‘National Defence Law’

- The Standing Committee of the 13th National People’s Congress (NPC) adopted the revised ‘National Defense Law’ on December 26, 2020. According to China’s Central Military Commission (CMC), a total of 54 articles were revised.¹¹The major revisions include: The Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era has been established as the guiding thought over China’s national defense activities; the national defense duties of relevant state organs have been adjusted and the CMC chairman shall assume overall responsibility; the tasks and goals for the construction of China’s armed forces have been further elaborated; the defense policy for major security domains is specified in view of activities and interest-defending needs in new security domains; the systems of national defense education and mobilization have been enriched and perfected in view of the reforms; protection of the position, rights, and interests of military personnel has been intensified to make sure service members are respected across society; and policies and systems concerning foreign military relations have been refined following the overall national security outlook.

China’s Joint Military Exercises: Pakistan, Russia and Vietnam

- Enhancing its military preparedness and combat readiness, the Chinese military has conducted joint military exercises with a host of countries in the last two months.

The 9th ‘Shaheen’ (Eagle) joint air force exercise between China and Pakistan was held from December 7 to 25, 2020 at the Pakistan air base, Bholari. On the significant of this joint exercise between the two countries, Major General Sun Hong, Assistant Chief of Staff, PLAAF, stated that, “the joint exercise will improve the actual level of combat training and strengthen practical cooperation between the two air forces.”¹² Also, Air Vice-Marshal Waqas Ahmed Sulehri, Deputy Chief of Air Staff (Operations), PAF, stated that, “The joint exercise will provide an opportunity to further enhance interoperability of both the air forces, thereby fortifying brotherly relations between the two countries.”¹³

On the other hand, in the wake of experts’ views that such a joint exercise between China and Pakistan has a larger strategic implication for India, the spokesperson of the Chinese foreign ministry, Wang Wenbin has however clarified that such a joint exercise is “a regular arrangement between Chinese and Pakistani militaries that doesn’t target any third party.”¹⁴ Meanwhile, on the future prospects of China-Pakistan bilateral relations, the spokesperson for China’s Ministry of National Defence, Senior Col. Tan Kefie asserted that “the bilateral relations can only get better in the future” in which the military ties “serve as an important pillar for the for the two countries’ bilateral relationship.”¹⁵

¹¹ "Revised national defense law to take effect in China on January 1, 2021" *Ministry of National Defence of the People’s Republic of China*, December 29, 2020 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-12/29/content_4876134.htm (Accessed on January 19, 2021).

¹² "Pakistan-China joint air exercise begins" *Dawn*, December 10, 2020 at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1594931/pakistan-china-joint-air-exercise-begins> (Accessed on January 8, 2021).

¹³ "Pakistan-China joint air exercise begins" *Dawn*, December 10, 2020 at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1594931/pakistan-china-joint-air-exercise-begins> (Accessed on January 8, 2021).

¹⁴ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on December 21, 2020" *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, December 21, 2020 at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1841684.shtml(Accessed on January 13, 2021).

¹⁵ “China-Pakistan relations can only get better: defense spokesperson”, *Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China*, December 31, 2020 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-12/31/content_4876253.htm (Accessed on January 15, 2021).

The second joint aerial strategic patrol between the air forces of China and Russia was held on December 22, 2020. In the joint exercise, four Chinese H-6K bombers and two Russian Tu-95 bombers participated in the Asia-Pacific region (the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea). The reason for choosing these venues was the fact that both China and Russia have constant and common concerns on the strategic stability in these regions. According to the Chinese defence ministry, the joint aerial strategic patrols will “further develop the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, enhance the strategic cooperation level and joint operation capability of the two countries’ militaries, and safeguard the global strategic.”¹⁶

The Chinese PLA Southern Theatre Command and the Vietnam People’s Navy conducted the 29th joint patrol in the Beibu Gulf Economic Rim. The joint exercise focused on communications verification, and joint search and rescue exercise were carried out in order to improve their capability to jointly respond to maritime security threats and maintain stability in the Beibu Gulf.¹⁷ The joint patrol exercise between the Chinese and the Vietnamese navies in the Beibu Gulf has been successfully conducted since 2005.

Chinese Defence Minister’s Tour to South Asia: Nepal and Pakistan

- During his tour of the South Asian region, Chinese defence minister, Wei Fenghe met several Nepali government officials, including Prime Minister and Chief of the army staff on November 29, 2020. During his meeting with Nepali officials, the Chinese defence minister appreciated Nepal’s stand on the ‘one-China policy’ and also assured China’s continued close communication with Nepal and support and assistance for military development as well as benefits to both peoples and regional stability.¹⁸

From Kathmandu, the Chinese defence minister travelled to Pakistan, where several high official meetings were held on December 1, 2020, including with Pakistani President and Prime Minister. The Pakistani officials reiterated to the visiting Chinese defence minister the further strengthening of cooperation within the CPEC and more “comprehensive and closer strategic cooperation to raise the iron-clad Pakistan-China brotherhood to a new height.” Concomitantly, the Chinese defence minister has assured that China is “willing to strengthen strategic communications, enhance strategic mutual trust and strengthen strategic cooperation with Pakistan,” and both China and Pakistan “should push the mil-to-mil relationship to a higher level.”¹⁹

¹⁶ “China, Russia hold second joint aerial strategic patrol, which could become ‘routine’, *China Military*, December 23, 2020 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-12/23/content_9957169.htm (Accessed on January 15, 2021).

¹⁷ “China, Vietnam warp up 29th joint patrol in Beibu Gulf” *China Military*, December 10, 2020 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-12/10/content_9950752.htm (Accessed on January 21, 2021).

¹⁸ “Nepalese leaders meet Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe” *Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China*, November 30, 2020 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-11/30/content_4874840.htm (Accessed on January 21, 2021).

¹⁹ “Pakistani President, PM meet Chinese Defense Minister in Islamabad”, *Ministry of National Defense of the people’s Republic of China*, December 1, 2020 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-12/01/content_4874906.htm (Accessed on January 21, 2021).

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.²⁰

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.”²¹

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.”²² 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.”²³

²⁰ 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).

²¹ 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).

²² 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).

²³ “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).

It in particular enhances Taiwan's long-term long-range surveillance capabilities. It "could fly near Chinese vessels to provide critical intelligence for the US to target them."²⁴

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, SeaView 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.²⁵

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.²⁶

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.²⁷ 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

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ 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).

²⁷ 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).

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.

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."²⁸

JAPAN

Japan to Build Two Aegis-Equipped Guided-Missile Destroyers

- The Japanese defence ministry has confirmed that Japan will build two new Aegis-equipped guided-missile destroyers as an alternative to the scrapped Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defence system²⁹ following ballooning costs and protests from local host sites. The decision has been made following an interim report that getting additional Aegis-equipped destroyers is the most feasible of all three choices based on capabilities and maneuverability. Japan was considering using the big private-sector merchant vessels as BMD platforms or constructing offshore structures to host the systems. Meanwhile, Japan has approved a defence budget of \$51.7 billion for fiscal 2021, up 1.1 per cent from the previous year.

India-Japan Defence Ministers' Meeting

- On December 22, 2020, Indian Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh held a telephonic meeting with his Japanese counterpart, Kishi Nobuo.³⁰ They decided to work together to counter disinformation following the COVID-19 outbreak. They also agreed to share lessons in humanitarian aid and disaster response operations during COVID-19, and further explore new opportunities in third-country

²⁸ "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).

²⁹ Kosuke Takahashi, "Japan to build two new Aegis-equipped destroyers as alternatives to land-based BMD systems", *Janes*, December 9, 2020 at [https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/japan-to-build-two-new-aegis-equipped-destroyers-as-alternatives-to-land-based-bmd-systems#:~:text=Japanese%20Defense%20Minister%20Nobuo%20Kishi,missile%20defence%20\(BMD\)%20systems](https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/japan-to-build-two-new-aegis-equipped-destroyers-as-alternatives-to-land-based-bmd-systems#:~:text=Japanese%20Defense%20Minister%20Nobuo%20Kishi,missile%20defence%20(BMD)%20systems). (Accessed on December 30, 2020)

³⁰ "Raksha Mantri speaks to his Japanese Counterpart over telephone", Press Information Bureau, December 22, 2020 at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1682714> Accessed on December 30, 2020

cooperation with the intention of making them more resilient to the pandemic. Both leaders confirmed that India and Japan would continue to strongly promote defence cooperation aimed at reinforcing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. They shared views concerning regional security situations, including the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The Japanese defence ministry indicated that both sides “concurred in sending a clear message that they strongly oppose any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by coercion or any activities that escalate tension”.

Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement

- Following six years of negotiations, Japan and Australia have agreed in principle on the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) during Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s visit to Tokyo. The objective is to facilitate deeper cooperation and improving interoperability between the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and the Australian Defence Force during joint exercises and disaster relief operations, by way of establishing procedures and legal status for each other’s visiting force in their territory. The RAA encompasses rationalization procedures to ease deployment and joint activities, together with entry and departure of the visiting force, custom duties and taxes, and criminal jurisdiction.³¹ The Japan-Australia RAA is only the second such arrangement that Tokyo has agreed to, besides the US. Japan has signed the Status of Forces Agreement with the US.

Japan joins the RCEP

- Japan has signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, touted as the world’s largest trading bloc, accounting for about 30 per cent of the world’s GDP and population.³² It includes China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand along with the 10 members of ASEAN. It will enter into effect once at least six ASEAN countries and three non-ASEAN countries ratify it. It is important to note that as Asia’s two leading economies, for China and Japan, RCEP is the first FTA connecting them. Reports suggest that tariffs on 86 per cent of Japanese goods exported to China will be removed, benefitting Japanese manufacturers.

Armitage-Nye Report Recommends Participation of Japan in the Five Eyes

- The Armitage-Nye reports published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has suggested that efforts must be made to incorporate Japan in the Five Eyes information-sharing network.³³ Currently the Five Eyes include the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Japan is continuously firming up cooperation on information-sharing with these governments, especially the US and UK. The report also talks about the bipartisan consensus in Washington on the significance of the US-Japan alliance.

³¹ “Reciprocal Access Agreement, Prime Minister of Australia”, November 17, 2020 at <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/reciprocal-access-agreement> Accessed on December 30, 2020

³² The 4th Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Summit and RCEP Agreement Signing Ceremony, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 15, 2020 at https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/fta/page1e_000291.html Accessed on December 30, 2020

³³ Yoshida Tomoyuki, “Press Conference by Foreign Press Secretary”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, December 9, 2020 at https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken23e_000010.html Accessed on December 30, 2020

Wang Yi visits Japan

- State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Japan on November 24, 2020 and participated in the Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting with his Japanese counterpart, Motegi Toshimitsu.³⁴ He also met with Prime Minister Suga. The focus was on recommencement of cross-border exchanges which was interrupted following the outbreak of the pandemic. This was the first face-to-face high-level meeting between two countries since the inauguration of the Suga administration. The Japanese side stressed early elimination of import restrictions on Japanese food products, as March 2021 will mark the tenth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, and decided to set up a "Japan-China Agricultural and Fishery Products Trade Cooperation Mechanism". Additionally, quick recommencement of exports of Japanese beef and expansion of rice exports was discussed. Furthermore, Japan has raised concerns over the developments in the East China Sea, and its implications for regional security.

Japan-Maldives Cooperation

- To reinforce the operational capability of the Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard, Japan committed equipment worth US\$ 7.6 million in the grant.³⁵ Under this grant, communication equipment for Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Villimale, search and rescue professional dive gears and related equipment, including recompression chambers, high-pressure air compressor, gas storage systems, remotely-operated underwater vehicle (ROV), underwater scooters and body recovery tools can be procured.

India-Japan Cooperation in Cyber Security

- On October 7, 2020, the union cabinet approved signing of an India-Japan Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) on cyber security. The aim is to advance capacity-building in cyberspace, secure critical infrastructure, and cooperate in emerging technologies. The focus is to develop practical cooperation in mitigating cyber security threats to ICT infrastructure. Advancing an open, interoperable, free, fair, secure and reliable cyberspace, both countries are committed to learning from each other's best practices in promoting the integrity of the supply chain of ICT products, and bolstering security of the ICT infrastructure through G2G and B2B cooperation.³⁶

³⁴ Japan-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Working Dinner, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 24, 2020 at https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_001084.html Accessed on December 30, 2020

³⁵ "The Government of Japan pledges equipment worth USD 7.6 million to strengthen the operational capability of the Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard", Embassy of Japan in Maldives, November 22, 2020 at https://www.mv.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00119.html Accessed on December 30, 2020

³⁶ "Signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of Cybersecurity between India and Japan", Ministry of External Affairs, October 7, 2020 at <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1662334#:~:text=Signing%20of%20the%20Memorandum%20of,Cybersecurity%20between%20India%20and%20Japan&text=The%20Union%20Cabinet%2C%20chaired%20by,cybersecurity%20between%20India%20and%20Japan> Accessed on December 30, 2020

India-Japan Strengthen Cooperation on Supply Chain

- Reports suggest that India and Japan have identified key sectors including automobiles and parts, petroleum, steel, textiles, financial services and IT, to advance the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) forged in cooperation with Australia.³⁷ The aim is to diversify supply sources, elevate sectoral competitiveness, and attract foreign direct investment. Meanwhile, Japan has agreed to extend financial assistance to Toyota-Tsusho and Sumida to diversify manufacturing from China to India. Also, Japan is reportedly assisting around ten companies including Suzuki Motor Corp. and Olympus Corp. to invest in innovative solutions in cooperation with Indian IT companies.

Quad Senior Officials' Meeting held

- On December 18, 2020, senior officials from India-Australia-Japan-US held virtual consultations on issues of mutual strategic interest including connectivity and infrastructure development, and security issues, including counter-terrorism, cyber security, maritime security, humanitarian and disaster relief.³⁸ They also exchanged views on the significance of augmenting resilience of supply chains for an expeditious global economic recovery. Each Quad member state has reiterated its commitment towards a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region built on shared values and principles of international law, particularly UNCLOS. Lauding Vietnam's ASEAN chairmanship, the Quad members reiterated their steady support for ASEAN-centrality and an ASEAN-led framework in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan and COVID-19 Vaccine

- Prime Minister Suga has confirmed that Japan will start administering Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine by late February 2021. Japanese media reports indicate that medical workers will top the priority list followed by elderly citizens. Subsequently, from April, the general population will get the vaccine. Japan aims to secure enough vaccine doses for its total population by mid-2021.

³⁷ "Key sectors could be focus areas under India-Japan-Australia supply chain initiative", PTI, November 6, 2020 at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/key-sectors-could-be-focus-areas-under-india-japan-australia-supply-chain-initiative/articleshow/79087727.cms> Accessed on December 30, 2020

³⁸ India-Australia-Japan-United States Senior Officials' Consultations, Ministry of External Affairs, December 18, 2020 at https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33315/IndiaAustraliaJapanUnited_States_Senior_Officials_Consultations Accessed on December 30, 2020

KOREAN PENINSULA

South Korea Prohibits Launching of Anti-North Korea Leaflets

- In December 2020, South Korean parliament passed a bill revising the Development of Inter-Korean Relations Act. It forbids disseminating leaflets criticising North Korean leader Kim Jong-un or launching of propaganda balloons towards North. Any violation may amount up to three years imprisonment or a US\$27,000 fine in case of conviction.³⁹ Pyongyang had earlier blown up the inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong following

³⁹ (LEAD) Assembly passes bill on banning cross-border launch of anti-Pyongyang leaflets, Yonhap New Agency, December 14, 2020 <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20201214003451315> Accessed on December 30, 2020

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

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