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# **EAST ASIA MILITARY MONITOR**

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**Editor**

**Titli Basu**

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

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East Asia Centre's bimonthly newsletter, *East Asia Military Monitor* tracks pertinent military, defence and security related developments with the goal of understanding the evolving trends in a timely manner. Our endeavour is to make accessible the military and security trends in the region to the larger strategic and academic community in a reader-friendly manner.

This issue of the *East Asia Military Monitor* features two expert commentaries. First, Dr. Prashant Kumar Singh presents a critical analysis of the student and youth-led protests in Hong Kong, and further evaluates its implication for Sino-US relations and Cross-Strait relations. He argues that Hong Kong's protests and its indirect challenge to One-Country-Two-Systems and Taiwan's continuous spurning of One-Country-Two-Systems should be seen as liberal democracy's fight against an alternative model built on prosperity as a value that the PRC is promoting. In the second commentary, Commodore Abhay Kumar Singh (retd.) shares his assessment of Vietnam's latest Defence White Paper and articulates that the 'four nos and related caveats' will define Hanoi's approach towards safeguarding its strategic and security interests in the South China Sea against China's growing strategic assertiveness. Furthermore, significant military, defence and security related developments in China, Taiwan, Japan and the Korean Peninsula are captured by way of brief news items.

We look forward to comments and suggestions from our readers.

Dr. Titli Basu

Associate Fellow, IDSA

# COMMENTARY

## HONG KONG IN 2019: FRAGILITY OF THE ONE COUNTRY-TWO-SYSTEMS ARRANGEMENT



**PRASHANT KUMAR SINGH**

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The student and youth-led movement that has been underway and has seen unprecedented violence in Hong Kong since June 2019, has exposed the fundamentally fragile nature of the One-Country-Two-Systems (OCTS) arrangement, regardless of repeated declarations by the People's Republic of China (PRC) of its commitment for the same. OCTS has been an article of faith for the PRC in dealing with Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan since the late 1970s. To be precise, its origin can be traced to 'PRC's New Year's Message to Compatriots in Taiwan' in 1979, 'Marshal Ye Jianying's "Nine-Point Proposal" of September 30, 1981' and Deng Xiaoping's exposition on Taiwan as a "Special Administrative Region" in 1983 for Taiwan's unification with China.<sup>1</sup> However, as history would have it, Hong Kong became the first territory where it was actually implemented after its retrocession from the United Kingdom (UK) to China in 1997, followed by Macau in 1999 which was handed over back to China by Portugal.

### One-Country-Two-Systems (OCTS) in Hong Kong

OCTS in Hong Kong stemmed from the "12 principles" China offered in 1983,<sup>2</sup> and "Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong" in 1984.<sup>3</sup> It is governed and regulated by "The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region [HKSAR] of the People's Republic of China". The Basic Law (BL) was promulgated in 1990 in the preparation for Hong Kong's governance after eventual retrocession in 1997. Under BL, Hong Kong is very much a Chinese province, yet with a special status, classified as the Special Administrative Region (SAR).<sup>4</sup> In the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, the PRC promised to stipulate the

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<sup>1</sup> Shirley A. Kan, "China/Taiwan: Evolution of the "One China" Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei", *CRS Report*, Congressional Research Service, October 10, 2014, p. 39, pp. 42-3, p. 47 at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30341.pdf> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Xinhua, "Full Text: The Practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" Policy in the HKSAR", *China Daily*, June 10, 2014 at [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-06/10/content\\_17576281.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-06/10/content_17576281.htm) (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> "Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong", Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau: The Government of HKSAR at [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/HK15th/2007-06/20/content\\_15483595.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/HK15th/2007-06/20/content_15483595.htm) (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Governing principles and policies for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) are very different from those applicable to China's autonomous regions. China has five autonomous regions on the Mainland: Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Tibet Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. HKSAR is not to be confused as an Autonomous Region.

basic policies regarding Hong Kong's special status in the BL and keep them "unchanged for 50 years" till 2047 — fifty years from 1997, the year of its retrocession.<sup>5</sup> However, for the people of Hong Kong, it is BL that is supreme, sacrosanct and above the SAR system. Under SAR status, China has sovereignty over Hong Kong and is responsible for its defence, yet Hong Kong's free market economy and its civil and political freedoms and cultural rights are respected. Hong Kong has an independent judiciary and some independent economic and cultural representation in the international community. It is a separate economic entity under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) regime. Moreover, Hong Kong's governance set-up has been modelled on liberal/representative democracy, albeit in a limited form. All these attributes concerning governance of HKSAR are antithetical to the socialist system practiced by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in Mainland China.

### Track-Record of OCTS in Hong Kong

Whether OCTS has worked well is a complex question. On the whole, it appears to have worked well. Economic, civil and political freedoms and judicial independence in Hong Kong have largely remained unharmed. However, people's anxieties have been two-fold from the beginning. First, only a few years after the retrocession, Beijing's control began gradually surfacing as an issue.<sup>6</sup> Over the years, it has become a predominant issue in Hong Kong. Enumerating Beijing's instances and methods of increasing control, is not possible here due to paucity of space. Suffice to say, the final interpretation of BL being vested in the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing, is a frequent point of reference, though this power has not been exercised as frequently.<sup>7</sup> As has been widely reported, this control has been increased by tweaking subordinate legislations and rules and regulations across the administrative set-ups in Hong Kong. Then, there are informal economic and social pressures, which have been felt in the media, the publishing industry and the civil society.<sup>8</sup> In addition, a common man in Hong Kong is feeling the pinch of economic hardships and competition in jobs and education in schools and universities due to close integration with Mainland China.<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, one can note that a sub-national *Hong Konger* identity, which was not expressed until now — at least strongly and explicitly — also seems to have gained traction. As per Hong Kong University's latest survey on people's ethnic identity, 52.9% respondents identify themselves as *Hong Konger*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Joint Declaration", No. 3.

<sup>6</sup> William H. Overholt, "Hong Kong at the Crossroads", RAND Cooperation, June 2004, p. 5 at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT228.html> (Accessed December 25, 2019); Bates Gill and James Tang, "US-Hong Kong Relations: Prospects for a Unique Partnership", Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), July 2007, p. 5 at [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/media/csis/pubs/070625\\_us\\_hongkong\\_relations.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/070625_us_hongkong_relations.pdf) (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Michael F. Martin, "Hong Kong's Protests of 2019", Congressional Research Service (CRS), October 18, 2019, p. 2 at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF11295.pdf> (Accessed December 25, 2019); Cliff Buddle, "Can Beijing's Power to Interpret Hong Kong's Basic Law Ever be Questioned?" *South China Morning Post*, October 11, 2017 at <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2114919/can-beijings-power-interpret-hong-kongs-basic-law-ever-be> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Frank Chen, "How Press Freedom in HK is being Destroyed", EJINSIGHT, January 12, 2015 at <http://www.ejinsight.com/20150112-how-press-freedom-in-hk-is-being-destroyed/> (Accessed December 25, 2019); "Hong Kong Bookseller Released by China is Missing - Daughter", *BBC*, October 24, 2017 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41734361> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Michael F. Martin, No. 7, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> See, Hong Kong University's POP Poll on People's Ethnic Identity at <https://www.hkpopop.hku.hk/english/popexpress/ethnic/eidentity/poll/datatables.html> (Accessed December 25, 2019). This poll was conducted in June 2019. Max Fisher, "One Country, Two Nationalisms?: The Identity Crisis behind Hong Kong's Turmoil", *The New York Times*, September 27, 2019 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/27/world/asia/hong-kong-protests-identity.html> (Accessed December 25, 2019); Chen Qingqing and Yang Sheng, "Hong Kong Riots 'Secessionist' Movement in Essence", *Global Times*, August 4, 2019 <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1160289.shtml> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

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Other source of anxiety is the future. There is no word from Beijing what the status of OCTS would be in Hong Kong after 2047. Time is running out very fast – 2047 is only twenty-seven years away. To ensure durability of Hong Kong’s democracy and enhance its democratic set up, there has been a demand for universal suffrage and the right to contest elections for the last two decades. This demand has seen many mass mobilisations in Hong Kong – the Umbrella Movement being the most iconic – in the second half of 2014.

## The Present Stand-off

The present unrest seems to have come as the point of inflection. It began in the wake of The Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019 that was proposed in June 2019. Had this bill been passed, it would have cleared the way for extradition arrangements between Hong Kong and Mainland China. They, presently, have no such system in place. This bill created chaos in Hong Kong. The locals’ opposition stemmed from their anxiety about the incompatibility between the legal systems practised in Hong Kong and Mainland China, and from their fear of this legislation clearing the way for Beijing’s curbs and control on Hong Kong. It (the proposed bill) not only rallied the pro-democracy forces but garnered unprecedented support from the usually pro-Beijing business community, which became apprehensive of this bill as it contained provisions for extradition for many economic crimes. There were also concerns that the bill, if passed, would further weaken the position of the Hong Kong police vis-à-vis its counterparts on the Mainland, given that there have been allegations of abducting some publishers from Hong Kong against Mainland Chinese police. The opposition to the bill has drawn support from across the spectrum, and has witnessed a passion for participation, an intensity in the scale of violence and prolonged mass protests. This has created an unprecedented stand-off between the authorities and the people. Pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong have been largely peaceful for last twenty years or so, without any loss of life or property. But this time, the level of violence, arson and damage to property, and use of firearms by the Hong Kong police have been startling. Rumours abound that the Mainland is likely to send PLA troops (a PLA garrison is permanently stationed in Hong Kong) to quell the protests. A surreptitious presence of the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force (PAP) from the regions nearby has been reported by the media.

The protestors’ demands have evolved into five principal demands since June 2019:

1. To withdraw the draft legislation.
2. To hold an inquiry to investigate police conduct during demonstrations.
3. To stop characterising the protests as riots.
4. To grant amnesty to those who have been arrested.
5. To restart the city’s stalled political reform (universal suffrage) process.<sup>11</sup>

The proposed amendment bill has been withdrawn and shelved. The Chief Executive Carrie Lam’s administration has, however, been unyielding on other demands. Lam has issued vehement denials that her administration

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<sup>11</sup> *Strategic Digest*, IDSA, Vol. 1, No. 1, 11 October 2019, p. 2, at [https://idsa.in/system/files/page/2015/First\\_Issue\\_of\\_Strategic\\_Digest.pdf](https://idsa.in/system/files/page/2015/First_Issue_of_Strategic_Digest.pdf) (Accessed December 25, 2019); Michael F. Martin, No. 7, p. 1; Wong Tsui-kai, “Hong Kong protests: What are the ‘Five Demands’? What do Protesters Want?”, *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), August 20, 2019, at <https://yp.scmp.com/hongkongprotests5demands> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

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proposed the bill at the behest of the central government. What is important is that the protests have moved beyond opposition to the proposed amendment. Now the protesters are demanding complete democracy.

## **Future Implications of the Ongoing Protests**

Violent protests have been continuing on and off since June 2019. Their intensity has also fluctuated. There is no clear idea as to where they are leading. It is quite possible that this round of violence may die down or stop for the time being and the administration's will may prevail. However, that's not going to prove the end. One can discern the implications for Hong Kong, Sino-US relations, China-Taiwan (Cross-Strait) relations and for China itself.

### *Implications for Hong Kong*

Hong Kong's economic importance for China has gone down significantly. Hong Kong, in a way, facilitated China's economic liberalisation and its engagement with the market economies of the world. However, with the setting up of several large-scale special economic zones (SEZs) in China, Hong Kong's significance as a conduit to the international market has declined. Shanghai port and Beijing airport have diluted Hong Kong's primacy in terms of cargo capacity and passenger movement. Shanghai has emerged as a big international financial hub. A politically relaxed attitude towards Hong Kong of the Deng era is a thing of the past in the present Xi Jinping era. The people in Hong Kong share a perception that a general impatience and the tendency to discredit the special status of Hong Kong has increased during recent years. Keeping in mind the general trends in Mainland China, the Xi era has shown a tough attitude towards foreign presence in Hong Kong. Given that China has accused the US of fanning unrest in Hong Kong and banned the US NGO National Endowment for Democracy (NED), it is likely that China will continue to tighten its 'security grip' over Hong Kong. As Hong Kong approaches 2047 and uncertainties about its autonomy and democratic experiences deepen, there will be recurring cycles of violence at short intervals. However, only time will tell whether this violence will culminate in full-fledged secessionist terrorism or eventually be reduced to urban violence or a law and order problem under the heavy weight of Mainland China's security capabilities. A lot will depend on the international geopolitical and strategic situation.

### *Implications for Sino-US Relations*

In spite of President Trump's oscillations, the Hong Kong issue has emerged as a new fault-line between China and the US. Since the beginning of the protests, China has accused the US of having a hand behind them. The Hong Kong Policy Act, 1992 governs relations with Hong Kong. 85,000 US nationals are estimated to be residing in the territory and 1300 US companies are reported to be operating there.<sup>12</sup> The now-buried amendment bill was viewed with concern for the safety and security of US nationals. Initially, Trump in his tweets attempted to downplay the issue as China's internal matter. However, Congressional activism has successfully prevailed. Trump was compelled to sign the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act on November 27, 2019 after the House of Representatives and the Senate passed it with the "veto-proof majority."<sup>13</sup> The Act "compels the

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Wright, "Trump's Foreign Policy Crisis Arrives", Brookings, August 16, 2019 at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/08/16/trumps-foreign-policy-crisis-arrives/> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Emily Cochrane, Edward Wong and Keith Bradsher, "Trump Signs Hong Kong Democracy Legislation, Angering China", *The New York Times*, November 27, 2019 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/27/us/politics/trump-hong-kong.html> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

government to support Hong Kong pro-democracy activists by requiring it to impose sanctions on Chinese and Hong Kong officials responsible for human rights abuses in the territory.” It “would also require the State Department to annually review the special autonomous status it grants Hong Kong in trade considerations. That status is separate from the relationship with mainland China, and a revocation of the status would mean less favorable trade conditions between the United States and Hong Kong.”<sup>14</sup> A bill titled PROTECT Hong Kong Act (Placing Restrictions on Teargas Exports and Crowd Control Technology to Hong Kong Act) is pending before the US Congress for passage, which, if passed, will prohibit the sale of equipment to “various forces in Hong Kong, including the Hong Kong Police Force, the Hong Kong Correctional Services Department, and the Hong Kong Government Flying Service.”<sup>15</sup> Responding to these developments, China has imposed a ban on US military visits to Hong Kong.<sup>16</sup> It has “announced sanctions on several US NGOs,” for example, the aforementioned NED. It has accused the NED and other US NGOs of providing “financial, logistic, organizational and training support” to the protestors.<sup>17</sup> If read along with recently passed Congressional laws about Xinjiang and Taiwan and the executive actions of support, particularly in case of Taiwan, these acts and China’s retaliation is suffice to convey that Hong Kong seems to have emerged as another lever beside the South China Sea, Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang to exert strategic pressure on China for the US.

### *Implications for Cross-Strait Relations*

As has been aforementioned, OCTS first appeared as an offer to Taiwan. Recognising that Taiwan’s conditions are even more special than that of Hong Kong, the PRC has shown willingness to offer even higher degree of autonomy to Taiwan, albeit within the basic framework of OCTS. However, Taiwan has consistently rejected this offer and asserted its sovereignty (of Republic of China) vis-à-vis PRC. Both Kuomintang (KMT) – which believes in eventual unification under its interpretation of the One-China principle, and the current ruling party Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which does not rule out a *de jure* independent Taiwan if the Taiwanese people so desire – reject OCTS. Taiwan has closely followed OCTS in Hong Kong and has always treated it as a deadly or poisonous embrace. Developments in Hong Kong over the years have only vindicated its position. The present DPP government has been at the forefront of empathising with the protestors in Hong Kong. The DPP has provided party platforms for the Hong Kong protest leaders such as Joshua Wong. Public opinion is overwhelmingly in support of the protestors. It is possible that the events in Hong Kong may have contributed to help the incumbent president Tsai Ing-wen in her re-election in January 2020. By the time this commentary was published, the election had been concluded and the incumbent Tsai Ing-wen had won a second term in office with a huge margin.

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Wong, “Senate Passes Bill to Support Hong Kong Protesters, Putting Pressure on Trump”, *The New York Times*, November 19, 2019 at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/19/world/asia/senate-bill-hong-kong-protests.html> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> “H.R.4270 - Placing Restrictions on Teargas Exports and Crowd Control Technology to Hong Kong Act”, 116th Congress (2019-2020), Congress.Gov at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4270?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22PROTECT+hong+kong+act%22%5D%7D&s=2&r=1> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Bred Lendon, “China Bans US Military Visits to Hong Kong in Response to Washington’s Support for Protesters”, CNN, December 03, 2019 at <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/12/02/asia/us-military-hong-kong-intl-hnk-scli/index.html> (Accessed December 25, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference,” Foreign Ministry of People’s Republic of China (FMPRC) Website, December 03, 2019 at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1721187.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1721187.shtml) (Accessed December 25, 2019).

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### *Implications for China*

Despite buzz that China may resort to use of force to quell protests in Hong Kong, it has stayed clear of making any such move. The most obvious reason that can be discerned for this is, the PLA taking control of the security situation of Hong Kong will be an ultimate acknowledgement of the failure of China's much-advertised OCTS. As long as Taiwan is not reunified, OCTS has not outlived its utility, even though it appears to be running its course in Hong Kong. China has already witnessed 'black swans' in last three years or so with reference to the Sino-US trade war, deterioration in relations with some of its neighbours, the strategic situation in South China Sea, and the re-emergence of strains in Cross-Strait relations. Added to this is the international criticism of its handling of security situation in Xinjiang. Besides, China would have to take care of its international image and discourse carefully cultivated and woven around the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Also, even though the protesters' demand is limited to protecting Hong Kong's autonomy and democracy, we have no authoritative sources to know how common Chinese are perceiving them or how the situation might pan out to inspire the people in Mainland China with consequences for Xi Jinping's perceived plans for continuation of his leadership beyond two terms. Thus, this is a most inopportune time for China to assert militarily in Hong Kong. The obvious choice for China is to support the pro-Beijing authority in Hong Kong and tire the protestors out.

### **Finally...**

On a larger note, Hong Kong's protests and its indirect challenge to OCTS and Taiwan's continuous spurning of OCTS should be seen as liberal democracy's fight against an alternative model built on prosperity as a value that the PRC is vigorously promoting. Whether Hong Kong, and for that matter Taiwan too, will be able to hold on to what they cherish most, or will have to give up what they are fighting for, is best left to conjecture. At this point, one cannot discern the eventual outcome, but one can certainly visualise that the going is getting tough.

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## VIETNAM'S DEFENCE WHITE PAPER 2019: CHARTING A SAFE COURSE IN THE MIDST OF TURBULENT REGIONAL GEOPOLITICS



COMMODORE ABHAY KUMAR SINGH (RETD.)

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Vietnam released its fourth Defence White Paper on November 25, 2019, to coincide with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of Vietnam People's Army (VPA). Vietnam's first Defence White Paper was published in 1998 and the next two White Papers followed at a five-year interval, in 2004 and 2009 respectively. While the Defence White Paper 2019 comes after a decade after the last one, it is not fundamentally different from the previous White Papers. Compared to the third edition released in 2009, the 2019 edition provides detailed and more updated information about Vietnam's perception of the global and regional security environment, Vietnam's defence policy, and its defence forces. The document retains the same basic structure, but is lengthier and more nuanced.

The 2019 White Paper is divided into three parts. The first part describes the strategic context of Vietnam's National Defence Policy. The second discusses envisioned pathways to building comprehensive national power, including the factors and actors shaping national defence capability. The third part provides an overview of the organisational structure and guidelines for the transformation of the VPA. While retaining its structural congruence with previously published White Papers, the Defence White Paper 2019 provides a crucial window to discern the evolving pattern of Vietnam's strategic approach towards national security amidst the broader geopolitical complexity, rising tensions in the South China Sea and growing truculence in its bilateral relations with China.

As a declaratory policy document, there exists an obvious limitation to the extent which Vietnam can explicitly lay out its shift in its strategic priority given the uncertainty in the geopolitical milieu and its complicated bilateral dynamics with China. However, it does acknowledge the evolving geopolitical trends as countries are adjusting their multipolar and multicentre directions with strategies to prioritise their national interests above all values. This intense competition for interests among countries entails both opportunities and challenges for small and medium-sized countries. Insofar as the Asia-Pacific region is concerned, the White Paper argues that the region remains an arena for rivalry and influence intensification among major powers, harbouring destabilising elements, which are traditionally and non-traditionally alike.

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea – which Vietnam refers as the East Sea– has been referred to as a major challenge for regional stability and Vietnam's own strategic concerns. It has been argued that disputes over territorial sovereignty are likely to become more complex, potentially leading to conflicts. The White Paper points to Vietnam's efforts to settle and demarcate its land and maritime boundary with its neighbours, including China. The White Paper has acknowledged that divergences between Vietnam and China regarding sovereignty in the East Sea are historical, which need to be settled with precaution, avoiding negative impacts. In addition, Vietnam and China need to put more effort into maintaining stability in the East Sea, which is an obvious reference to the intensification of China's unilateral actions in disputed areas and also in Vietnam's Exclusive

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Economic Zone (EEZ). It has been pointed out that “new developments in the East Sea, including unilateral actions, power-based coercion, violations of international law, militarisation, change in the status quo, and infringement on Vietnam’s sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction as provided in international law, have undermined the interests of nations concerned and threatened peace, stability, security, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflight in the region.” While it does not call out China by name, it is clear that the White Paper reflects fears of Chinese encroachment. The sharper commentary on the East Sea (South China Sea) in the Defence White Paper 2019 certainly reflects Vietnam’s growing unease towards China’s aggressiveness and irredentism in the South China Sea in general and in Vietnam’s EEZ, which had resulted in the recent three-month standoff at Vanguard Bank.

Vietnam’s keystone doctrine of the three nos – no military alliances, no aligning with one country against another, and no foreign military bases on Vietnamese soil – has roots in its own historical experiences in navigating geopolitical complexities and has remained a prominent feature in all its Defence White Papers since 1998. However, defence and security cooperation with other countries has progressively become an important aspect of Vietnam’s strategic approach and was accordingly highlighted in its 2009 Defence White Paper.

The current White Paper has not only retained the ‘three nos’ but has also added a fourth ‘no’ about ‘not using force or threatening to use force in international relations’. It would be pertinent to highlight that this refrain about ‘not using force or threatening the use of force’ has existed even earlier in White Papers as a declaratory policy and as a preference for peace in the international relation but was not linked directly with the ‘three nos’ policy. Even though disavowal of use of force is enshrined in the UN Charter and also forms part of the ASEAN declaration, linking the phrase ‘non-use of force’ along with the ‘three nos’ led a transient kerfuffle among strategic commentators about whether this phrase constituted a ‘fourth no’. Anticipating this misunderstanding, Deputy Minister of Defence Nguyen Chi Vinh is reported to have clarified at the launch of the White Paper that if Vietnam is invaded, “we have to bear arms but our struggle is for peace”.

Notwithstanding this reiteration of the ‘three nos’ and related doctrinal restrictions, the Defence White Paper 2019 highlights some important caveats in pursuing its defence and security cooperation with its strategic partners and other countries. These caveats include; “depending on circumstances and specific conditions, Vietnam will consider developing necessary, appropriate defence and military relations with other countries”. along with its willingness to” participate in security and defence cooperation mechanisms suitable to its capabilities and interests, including security and defence mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific region as well as those of the European Union”. These new formulations, in essence, indicate Vietnam’s diplomatic dexterity which had been long evident in its foreign policy and had been articulated in its defence policy for the first time. Another important caveat includes Vietnam’s willingness “to welcome vessels of navies, coast guards, border guards, and international organisations to make courtesy or ordinary port visits or stopover in its ports to repair, replenish logistic and technical supplies or take refuge from natural disasters”. Given China’s sensitivities with the presence of external maritime powers in the South China Sea, Vietnam’s assertion to keep its ports open for other navies and coast guard reflects its desire to enhance its deterrence through an expanding network of maritime partners.

These ‘four nos and related caveats’ are expected to be part of Vietnam’s approach towards safeguarding its strategic and security interests in the South China Sea against China’s growing strategic assertiveness. While some commentators have argued about the basic nature of strategic guidelines contained in the White Paper, it needs to be noted that military institutions, in general, can seldom go beyond articulating basic guidelines in public documents. It needs to be noted that the Defence White Paper is one among other publicly disclosed policy documents related to Vietnam’s military and defence policy and it certainly highlights Vietnam’s evolving strategic approach in charting a safe course in the midst of rather turbulent regional geopolitics.

# MAPPING EAST ASIA

## CHINA

### Promotion of Generals

The media reported that “seven Chinese military officers have been promoted to the rank of general, the highest rank for officers in active service in China,” who were presented certificates of order by Xi Jinping, chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). The names of the new generals are as follows: Commander of the Eastern Theatre Command of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) He Weidong, Political Commissar of the PLA’s Eastern Theatre Command He Ping, Political Commissar of the PLA’s Southern Theatre Command Wang Jianwu, Commander of the PLA’s Northern Theatre Command Li Qiaoming, Commander of the PLA Rocket Force Zhou Yaning, Commander of the PLA Strategic Support Force Li Fengbiao, and Head of the PLA’s Academy of Military Sciences Yang Xuejun.<sup>1</sup>

### Weapons

In an interesting report, the media informed that “high clarity” artificial diamonds displayed at the recent 2019 China International Jewellery Fair at Beijing in the first week of December, “could also be used in military equipment, including laser weapons and other precision machines.” These are synthetic diamonds, which “are made in laboratories using special materials” and “put under high pressure and temperatures or treated with chemical vapours.” The military experts the report cited explained that “high-energy laser weapons may need industrial-level diamonds to ensure that their energy output is high enough to damage their targets...artificially produced diamonds can be used in core components of laser weapons and cost far less than natural diamonds.” It further elaborated that “diamonds are also widely used in radar equipment, high-precision machine manufacturing and aerospace optical devices... their hard, corrosion-resistant traits make them useful in a range of products from drills to microelectronics.” Thus, several countries “list artificial diamond-making technologies as confidential” and are unwilling to share it with China. Therefore, China will have to develop its own capabilities for military use of diamonds. Further, Chinese weapon manufacturers can “sell a significant number of artificial diamonds to jewellers” and the money earned can be “reinvested in its arms research projects,” the report concluded.<sup>2</sup>

### China’s Space Plane Programme

The media wrote about China developing “its own space plane, a genre of aircraft that is expected to become a crucial weapon in the future.” Its First Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Aerospace and Aerodynamics “successfully conducted a wind tunnel experiment, in which the second-stage aircraft freely detached from the first-stage aircraft of a two-stage-to-orbit (TSTO) space plane.” The report explained that TSTO meant that “the space plane consists of two aircraft, with the first stage carrying the second stage...The first stage will provide power to the space plane upon takeoff, and when it reaches a certain height and speed, the second stage will detach from it and power itself further into space, as the first stage will land just like a normal plane.” It reported that the Institute was able to “set up a universal wind tunnel experiment protocol, providing an advanced method

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<sup>1</sup> “7 Chinese Military Officers Promoted to Rank of General,” *Xinhua*, December 12, 2019 at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/12/c\\_138626138.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/12/c_138626138.htm) (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> “Arms Firm Makes Artificial Diamonds that could be used in Laser Weapons,” *People’s Daily*, December 5, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1205/c90000-9638210.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

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to develop future space planes.” In this experiment, “with the successful development of technologies like scramjet engines,” research has moved beyond the conceptual stage. As for the use of a space plane, it “can be used for reconnaissance, anti-satellite, anti-ballistic missile and ground attacks if used as a weapon... it can also send satellites and astronauts into space at a lower cost than rockets, because it is reusable and uses standard airports.” As per the report, this space plane programme is part of China’s Tengyun Project, which started in 2016. The first test flight is scheduled in 2030.<sup>3</sup>

### Civil-Military Integration for Supplies at Sea

To save time in replenishing ships at sea, “the *Taihu*, a military supply ship, conducted a replenishment docking with civilian container ship *Fuzhou* in an offshore area in mid-November amid the PLA’s exploration of new ways to replenish ships at sea.” This occasion was “the first time for the *Taihu* to receive supplies from a civilian vessel.” The report opined that “the success of the replenishment laid a foundation for mutual replenishment of various kinds of materials between military and civilian ships.” This new method of “mutual supply at sea between military and civilian ships” was necessitated because “the naval fleet is usually accompanied by supply ships. When supply ships start to deplete their cargo, they need to return to port for replenishment to restore their original capacity,” which consumes a lot of time.<sup>4</sup>

### Military Training

The Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy’s (PLAN’s) Southern Theatre Command, undertook a destroyer flotilla level “training exercise of visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) operations” in mid-November. The exercise was “a real combat training exercise in the South China Sea.” It involved “more than 10 subjects, including anti-submarine training based on destroyer-aircraft coordination, operational training on visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS), anti-terrorism and anti-piracy training, etc.”<sup>5</sup>

In mid-October, the media reported about a PLA air defence unit of the Tibet Military Command holding “a drill at an area, 4,500 meters above the sea level” in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) “to improve air defence preparedness in complex weather conditions.”<sup>6</sup> Probably, in this drill only, an artillery unit attached to an air-defence brigade tested the capabilities of a towed howitzer system “during a recent live-fire training operation at the altitude of 4,500 meters.” The brigade is informed to conduct “such training subjects as [a] long-distance and round-the-clock real combat live-fire training operation, reconnaissance, electronic interference operation, and so on, in order to test troops’ air-defence capabilities.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Nation Makes Breakthrough in Space Plane Project,” *Global Times*, October 22, 2019 at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1167650.shtml> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Xinhua, “Chinese Military Exploring New Ways of Replenishment Support at Sea,” *People’s Daily*, December 2, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1202/c90000-9637271.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> China Military Online, “Guided-Missile Destroyer Conducts Real Combat Training Exercise,” *People’s Daily*, November 19, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1119/c90000-9633644.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> “PLA Stages Air Defence Drill in Tibet,” *People’s Daily*, October 17, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1017/c90000-9623893.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> “UAV Launched for Reconnaissance Mission in Real Combat Scenario,” *People’s Daily*, November 7, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1107/c90000-9630330.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

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## International Military Cooperation

In mid-November, Defence Minister Wei Fenghe travelled to Bangkok where he held discussions with Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. During the meeting, they “agreed to further enhance military cooperation.” The Thai Prime Minister reiterated his country’s support for the one-China policy and expressed willingness to “actively participate in the Belt and Road Initiative.” The two countries are expected to “further strengthen military cooperation in equipment and technology, joint exercises and joint training, as well as multilateral security.” The meeting saw the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on defence cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

## International Military Exercise

The Chinese media covered the eighth India-China Joint Counter-terrorism Exercise codenamed “Hand-in-Hand 2019” at Umroi Cantonment in Meghalaya in India, which was taking place at the time this newsletter was being compiled. The two militaries “dispatched 130 service members” each “to take part in the 16-day exercise.” The Chinese troops came from the PLA Xizang (Tibet) Military Command. The exercise was “a semi-urban terrain, the exercise [was] divided into three phases, namely, adaptive training, mixed training and comprehensive exercise,” in which the two sets of troops were “mixed into two groups to live and train together and exchange on skills, tactics, training methods and command procedures.” This exercise was begun in 2007.<sup>9</sup>

Chinese ships sailed to participate in the Multinational Maritime Exercise with South Africa and Russia in Cape Town from November 25-30, 2019. It was the first trilateral exercise between them “in South African Waters.”<sup>10</sup> It “focused on maritime economic security, interoperability and maintaining the good relations between the participating navies.” The exercise involved “gunnery exercise, helicopter cross deck landings, boarding operations as well as disaster control exercise.” South Africa termed it a “multinational willingness to ensure regional maritime peace, security and stability.”<sup>11</sup>

## Chinese ‘Incursions’ in the Disputed ECS Increase Drastically

*Bloomberg* reported that “Chinese maritime incursions near Japanese-held islands in the East China Sea” (ECS) has touched a new high this year in 2019. It cited the data from the Japan Coast Guard that “Chinese government ships, including coast guard vessels, have entered what Japan considers its exclusive waters more than 1,000 times this year,” registering “an 80 per cent increase over last year, and far more than any year since 2012, when China began making regular incursions around the islands.” In addition, as per the data recently released by Japan, “at least 14 Japanese citizens have been detained in China since 2015.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Xinhua, “China, Thailand Agree to Enhance Military Cooperation,” *People’s Daily*, November 18, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1118/c90000-9632934.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> China Military Online, “China, India Conduct “Hand-in-Hand 2019” Joint Anti-Terrorist Exercise,” *People’s Daily*, December 10, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1210/c90000-9639467.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Xinhua, “Chinese Naval Warship Open to Public during Maritime Exercise in S. Africa,” *People’s Daily*, November 28, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1128/c90000-9636332.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Xinhua, “S. African Navy Hosts Russia, China for Maritime Exercise,” *People’s Daily*, November 27, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1127/c90000-9635911.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Jon Herskovitz, “China Maritime Incursions Near Japan-Held Islands Hit Record,” *Bloomberg*, December 6, 2019 at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-12-05/china-maritime-incursions-around-japan-held-islands-hit-record> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

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## First China-Russia Road Bridge

The first road bridge between Russia and China across the River Amur, expected to open in Spring 2020, will link Blagoveshchensk in Russian Far East and Heihe in North-eastern China. This is an important project which will “increase the volume of freight traffic and agricultural products between the two countries” as Russia has “sought to step up ties with China after the West imposed sanctions on it over its annexation of the Crimea[n] Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014.” Besides, the two countries will soon “launch the ‘Power of Siberia’ natural gas pipeline, which is a 30-year and \$400-billion deal. The 20- kilometre long bridge, with new roads, has been completed by a Russo-Chinese company. China had completed the work on its side in October 2018 with 5.2 billion Roubles, whereas Russia has spent around 13.6 billion Roubles and has taken an extra year to complete the project on its side.<sup>13</sup>

## Chinese Aircraft Carrier Plans Faces Challenges

China’s initial plan of have six aircraft carriers might be facing challenges due to budgetary considerations and technical issues. China’s first aircraft carrier, *Liaoning* has been useful in conducting deterrence patrol in the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea and Japan’s Miyako Strait. However, as China’s first aircraft carrier, the refurbished Soviet *Varyag* multi-role aircraft carrier has been with the PLA Navy, its first home-grown aircraft carrier, *Shandong* had attracted much attention. It had started sea trials in late 2019 but reports are already emerging that there are some challenges ahead for the PLA Navy. The Type 001A led by China’s naval officers conducted fresh set of sea trials in August 2019.<sup>14</sup> Right after the PLA Navy conducted another set of sea trials, experts pointed to some technical issues that may have to be fixed. Song Zhongping stated in a new report that the fact that “the aircraft carrier needed to be tested again within two days, suggests that the navy may have found some technical problems in last week’s sea trial that needed to be fixed immediately” and called it “fairly typical”.<sup>15</sup> This aircraft carrier is expected to have EMALs (electromagnetic aircraft launch system), which is installed in the latest Ford-Class carriers of the US.<sup>16</sup> However, further reports emerged that China might shelve its plans to build six aircraft carriers and might restrict it to only four.<sup>17</sup> The third and fourth aircraft carriers, termed as Type 002 are under construction and are generally conventionally-powered carriers. However, the advanced carriers are supposed to be nuclear-powered and the current lag in technology has impeded the Chinese desire to operate one.

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<sup>13</sup> Gleb Stolyarov, “Russia and China Deepen Ties with River Amur Bridge,” *Reuters*, November 29, 2019 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-china-bridge/russia-and-china-deepen-ties-with-river-amur-bridge-idUSL8N28920Y> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Minnie Chan, “China’s First Home-Grown Aircraft Carrier The Type001A Set for New Round of Sea Trials as It Prepares to Enter to Service”, *South China Morning Post*, August 1, 2019 at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3020843/chinas-first-home-grown-aircraft-carrier-type-001a-set-new>, (Accessed July 25, 2019)

<sup>15</sup> Minnie Chan, “Another Sea Trial for China’s First Home-Grown Aircraft Carrier “Suggest Technical Problem””, *South China Morning Post*, August 6, 2019 at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3021707/another-sea-trial-chinas-first-home-grown-aircraft-carrier> (Accessed July 25, 2019)

<sup>16</sup> H. I. Sutton, “Power Projection: China’s Fourth Aircraft Carrier”, *Forbes*, December 3, 2019 at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2019/12/03/super-power-projection-work-to-start-on-chinas-4th-aircraft-carrier/#3cdf800a5d38>, (Accessed July 25, 2019)

<sup>17</sup> Steven Stashwick, “Technical Problems, Slowing Economy Cut China’s Carrier Ambition”, *The Diplomat*, December 04, 2019 at <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/technical-problems-slowing-economy-cut-chinas-carrier-ambitions/>, (Accessed July 25, 2019) ; Also see, Minnie Chan, “Chinese Navy Set Build Fourth Aircraft Carrier, But Plans for a more Advanced Ship are Put On Hold”, *South China Morning Post*, November 28, 2019 at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3039653/chinese-navy-set-build-fourth-aircraft-carrier-plans-more> (Accessed July 25, 2019)

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## China Conducts 11<sup>th</sup> DF-41 Missile Test

China conducted the 11<sup>th</sup> flight test of the DF-41 ICBM on November 22, 2019.<sup>18</sup> As per Chinese reports and the 2019 Military Parade, the DF-41 has already been deployed. This test comes as a surprise as the last ten tests were advertised to have been complete successes and news about the deployment made headlines in both Chinese and Western media. The Chinese news speculated that since the test was conducted after a break it indicates that probably the PLA Rocket Forces were deciding to see whether the missile could be built in batches.<sup>19</sup>

## Shipbuilding Companies' Merger in China

The Assets Supervision and Administration Commission has completed the merger of the China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC) and China Shipbuilding Industry Company (CSIC), while retaining the name of CSIC. The new company would have “147 scientific research institutes and listed companies and enterprises”.<sup>20</sup> The mergers are important as the PLA Navy is venturing into building more aircraft carriers and other naval assets. After the merger, this firm will be the largest shipbuilder in the world with the “with 20 per cent of [the] global market share, \$110 billion in assets and more than 300,000 employees up and down China’s eastern seaboard”.<sup>21</sup> The merger is set to benefit the naval arms industry as “a lot of products and services offered by CSSC and CSIC were basically identical, ranging from amphibious assault ships to landing craft and light-duty combat vessels....Under a unified brand, the new company will be better able to plan, promote and develop its business for products and services in the global market”.<sup>22</sup>

## 70th Anniversary of Chinese Air Force

On November 11, 2019, China celebrated the 70th anniversary of the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF). Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated the PLA Air Force and stressed for ambitious reforms to make it a world-class organisation. China has over the last few years embarked on a path of military modernisation, including the Air Force that is crucial for Chinese plans for swift operations of joint theatre commands. China has been on a commissioning spree of indigenous aircraft such as J-10B /C fighter jet, J-20 stealth fighter, H-6K bombers, J-16 multirole fighter, Y-20 heavy transport aircraft and KJ-500 early warning aircraft. Further, apart from sending PLAAF for patrols across the East China Sea, South China Sea, around the Taiwan border and in

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<sup>18</sup> Boyko Nikolov, “China Has Conducted Test of the Latest Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Dongfeng-41”, November 29, 2019, at <https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2019/11/29/china-has-conducted-test-of-the-latest-intercontinental-ballistic-missile-dongfeng-41/> (Accessed August 3, 2019)

<sup>19</sup> China’s 11<sup>th</sup> Time Tested DF-41 Ballistic Missile, Is Different From the 10<sup>th</sup> Test”, (-NýV,{11!kÖ\“NÎˆ41ü[9\_NMR10!k gf>fNT), *Ordinance Technology*, November 29, 2019, at <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/jssd/2019-11-29/doc-iihnzhahi4196038.shtml> (Accessed 3 August 2019)

<sup>20</sup> “China completes merger of CSIC and CSSC to create shipbuilding firm”, *Ship Technology*, November 27, 2019 at <https://www.ship-technology.com/news/china-csic-cssc-merger/> (Accessed 3 August 2019)

<sup>21</sup> “CSIC-CSSC Re-Merger Completed”, *Maritime Executive* at <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/csic-cssc-re-merger-completed>, (Accessed 3 August 2019)

<sup>22</sup> “Two leading shipbuilders merged to form huge company”, *China Daily*, October 29, 2019 at [http://www.china.org.cn/business/2019-10/29/content\\_75350585.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/business/2019-10/29/content_75350585.htm), (Accessed 3 August 2019)

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the Western Pacific in the past decade, Beijing has been engaging in joint air exercises with partners such as Pakistan, Russia, and Thailand.<sup>23</sup>

### China's second aircraft carrier

The final preparations to commission China's second aircraft carrier took place in October and November 2019. China conducted its final two trials i.e., the eighth trial in October and ninth in November, before officially commissioning its second aircraft carrier, *Shandong* (hull 17), on December 17, 2019. The first-ever trial took place in May 2018. The most striking feature of this new aircraft carrier is that it is the first domestically built carrier for China, for which the work began in November 2013. China's first aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, was commissioned in 2012 and it was originally built to serve the Soviet Navy. Talking to *Global Times* about the event, one Chinese military analyst commented, "While the *Liaoning* could go from the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean and train more pilots and officers, the *Shandong* could sail from the South China Sea into the Pacific Ocean and even go to the Indian Ocean."<sup>24</sup>

### World Military Games

China had hosted the seventh edition of World Military Games from October 18 to October 27 in 2019 in the city of Wuhan. The event began with the address from the Chinese President Xi Jinping welcoming delegations from 109 nations in the presence of around 60,000 spectators. The World Military Games, also known as 'Olympics for Military', are conducted every four years under the supervision of the International Military Sports Council. The first such event took place in Rome in 1995. The World Military Games is one event where participants from military backgrounds compete in the field of sports, instead of the battlefield. Promoting the sports ecosystem domestically, projecting Beijing's soft power and promoting its image as a peace-loving nation are some of the intentions behind China hosting this particular event.<sup>25</sup>

### Ninth Beijing Xiangshan Forum

The ninth Beijing Xiangshan Forum was held at Beijing, China, from October 20 to October 22, 2019. The central theme of the Forum this year was "Maintaining International Order and Promoting Peace in the Asia-Pacific". The forum that started with the Chinese President Xi Jinping's congratulatory message and later continued with the keynote speech from Wei Fenghe, Chinese State Councillor and Defence Minister. Taking a dig at the United States (US), he called for peace by promoting cooperation and applying brakes to power politics and the hegemonic global system. Further, he reiterated Chinese claims to sovereignty and territorial jurisdiction over

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<sup>23</sup> Liu Xuanzun and Liu Yang (*Global Times*), "China to create world-class air force", *People's Daily*, November 12, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1112/c90000-9631367.html> (Accessed December 15, 2019); Xinhua, "Xi stresses building world-class air force", *People's Daily*, November 9, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1109/c90000-9630792.html> (Accessed December 15, 2019); Chen Zhuo, "Systematic combat capability of the PLAAF aviation force achieves leapfrogging", *China Military Online*, November 4, 2019 at [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-11/04/content\\_9668461.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-11/04/content_9668461.htm) (Accessed December 15, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Liu Xuanzun and Guo Yuandan, "China commissions 2nd aircraft carrier", *Global Times*, December 17, 2019 at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1173837.shtml> (Accessed December 15, 2019); *Global Times*, "China's second aircraft carrier prepares for commissioning ceremony: report", *China Military Online*, October 30, 2019 at [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/30/content\\_9664331.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/30/content_9664331.htm) (Accessed December 15, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Xinhua, "Xi sends message of peace at 'Olympics for military'", *People's Daily*, October 20, 2019, at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1020/c90000-9624666.html> (Accessed December 15, 2019).

Taiwan, the islands' spread across the South China Sea and the Diaoyu Islands and affiliated islands in the East China Sea. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu also attended the Forum where he highlighted growing cooperation between Russia and China and questioned the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US. In total, the event was attended by over 1,300 participants, including defence ministers from 23 nations and 76 official delegations. Major power politics, the interests of small and medium-sized countries, maritime security, future warfare, artificial intelligence, among others, are some of the issues that were discussed during the event.<sup>26</sup>

## THE TAIWAN STRAIT

### Chinese Warship Sailing through the Taiwan Strait

The Chinese media reported that “a Chinese aircraft carrier passed through the Taiwan Strait on Sunday [on November 17, 2019] to conduct scientific research tests and routine training in relevant waters of the South China Sea.” It cited a spokesperson for the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) as saying that “the organization of the cross-regional tests and training of the homemade aircraft carrier is a normal arrangement in the process of aircraft carrier construction, is not aimed at any specific target and has nothing to do with the current situation.”<sup>27</sup> It termed it “as a routine sea trial” for “equipment tests and personnel training” at “at our own doorstep.” Although the Chinese media reports did not identify the type and name of the aircraft carrier, it is a new aircraft carrier. The sailing through Taiwan Strait was its ninth sea trial “since its maiden trial in May 2018.” Its construction “began in November 2013 in Dalian, Liaoning province” and it was launched in April 2017.<sup>28</sup> (Please see more on this in the subsequent section).

Defence Minister Wei Fenghe met US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper on November 18, 2019 in Bangkok when he was on his official tour to Thailand, and to co-chair the 10th China-ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Informal Meeting. Significantly, the Taiwan issue appeared to have figured in their meeting prominently. It was “their first face-to-face meeting since Esper took office.” Wei conveyed to him that “China is always committed to solving the Taiwan question by peaceful means, but will never countenance major ‘Taiwan independence’ acts.”<sup>29</sup> This had significance in view of the current stand-offish situation prevailing in the Taiwan Strait between Beijing and Taipei. In the meeting, he also urged the US not to flex “its muscles in the South China Sea and to not provoke and escalate tensions in this region.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Global Times*, “China promotes peace, denounces hegemony at Xiangshan forum”, China Military Online, October 21, 2019 at [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/21/content\\_9657439.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/21/content_9657439.htm) (Accessed December 15, 2019). Xinhua, “9th Beijing Xiangshan Forum concludes”, China Military Online, October 23, 2019 at [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/23/content\\_9658666.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/23/content_9658666.htm) (Accessed December 15, 2019); *Global Times*, “Defense chief stresses peace through cooperation at forum”, China Military Online, October 22, 2019 at [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/22/content\\_9658029.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/22/content_9658029.htm) (Accessed December 15, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> “China’s Aircraft Carrier Passes through Taiwan Strait,” *Xinhua*, November 18, 2019 at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/18/c\\_138563832.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/18/c_138563832.htm) (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> “Defense Minister: No Independence Move by Island will be Tolerated,” *People’s Daily*, November 19, 2019 at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/11/19/c90000-9633592.html> (Accessed December 13, 2019). The news was first published in *China Daily* by Zhao Lei.

<sup>29</sup> Zhao Lei, “Defense Minister: No Independence Move by Island will be Tolerated,” *China Daily*, November 19, 2019 at [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2019-11/19/content\\_37523842.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2019-11/19/content_37523842.htm) (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Phil Stewart, “China Calls on U.S. to ‘Stop Flexing Muscles’ in South China Sea,” *Reuters*, November 18, 2019 at <https://fr.reuters.com/article/asia/idUSKBN1XS09W> (Accessed December 13, 2019)

# TAIWAN

## Military-Diplomatic Manoeuvres

- Taiwan's air force conducted "joint exercises to simulate protective manoeuvres when enemy aircraft are approaching to better prepare its anti-aircraft capabilities" on November 19, 2019. It was reported to be "an arranged routine exercise, not a surprise drill in response to China's "Type 001A" aircraft carrier and its escorts transiting the Taiwan Strait" on November 17, 2019. Taiwanese forces' entire anti-aircraft capabilities, including cyber warfare, were tested in this drill. The main vehicle of this exercise were F-16s from Hualien Air Force Base in eastern Taiwan that "simulated an opposition force attacking Taiwan's coastal anti-aircraft batteries, as well as navy and Coast Guard Administration facilities." The Chief of the General Staff Shen Yi-ming and air force Commander-in-Chief Hsiung Hou-chi "presided over the exercise."<sup>31</sup>
- In a military-diplomatic manoeuvre, China's indigenously built aircraft carrier, Type 002, "sailed through the Taiwan Strait together with a battle group" on November 17, 2019, the same day when the incumbent Tsai Ing-wen's candidature was announced from the "independence-leaning" Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) for the 2020 presidential election." To this incident, Taiwan responded by carrying out the aforementioned air force exercise.<sup>32</sup> The media has revealed the names of the two aircraft carriers – Type 001A and Type 002.
- The Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser *USS Chancellorsville* (CG 62) had sailed through the Taiwan Strait around November 11-13, 2019, as both Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the US' 7th Fleet's Facebook page has revealed. "*Chancellorsville* is forward-deployed to the US' 7th Fleet area of operations in support of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region." This was the 9<sup>th</sup> visit by US warships this year and was important as it came a time when the US Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper was "making an Indo-Pacific trip, which begins on Wednesday, visiting South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam."<sup>33</sup> Incidentally, in some reports, the visit is termed as the 8<sup>th</sup> visit, not the 9<sup>th</sup>.

## Arms Purchase and Capacity-building

- The media reported that "Taiwan has received a draft letter of offer and acceptance (LOA), a contract between the United States military and a foreign customer, detailing an offer from the Pentagon to sell more than 100 M1A2 Abrams tanks to Taiwan." Taiwan has been trying to buy this tanks since 2000. Earlier in July, the US Department of State had "approved a possible sale to Taiwan of 108 M1A2 Abrams tanks, Stinger man-portable air defense systems, and other related equipment worth over US\$2.2 billion." The LOA is expected to be signed soon. In preparation of the possible deal, the US "recently sent technical personnel to Taiwan to make proposals regarding maintenance plants, oil depots and other related facilities".<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Aaron Tu and Jake Chung, "Military Holds Drill to Prepare for Air Attacks," *Taipei Times*, November 20, 2019 at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/11/20/2003726184> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Emerson Lim and Matt Yu, "Taiwan Conducts 'Routine' Air Defense Exercise," *Focus Taiwan*, November 19, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201911190012.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Emerson Lim, "U.S. Warship Sails through Taiwan Strait, Ninth This Year," *Focus Taiwan*, November 13, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201911130006.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>34</sup> Matt Yu and Emerson Lim, "Taiwan Receives Draft LOA on Tank Sale from U.S.: MND," *Focus Taiwan*, November 13, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201911130012.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

- Taiwan's Executive Yuan "finalized a special budget request of NT\$247.2 billion (US\$8.12 billion) to procure 66 F-16V jets from the US." As per the details reported, the amount "includes the cost of the jets, their avionics, other software and hardware, and research and development (R&D) costs, which total about NT\$246.7 billion, while on-site technological advisory, training and transportation costs take up the remaining NT\$500 million [NT\$.5 billion]." The proposed funding will be spread in "six fiscal years from next year through 2026." Taiwan is expected to receive delivery of "all of the warplanes" by 2026. Out of NT\$247.2 billion, "NT\$232.2 billion would be sourced through loans, while NT\$15 billion would be drawn from surplus revenue." Replying to the query, "why the unit price of the F-16V is higher than what the US quoted other nations for the F-35?" Deputy Minister of National Defense Chang Guan-chung clarified that, "the quote for the F-35 did not include R&D costs, estimated at about US\$53 billion. The F-35 unit price cited by media reports was for nations that participated in R&D of those planes, while the price for Taiwan's F-16Vs includes such costs, which makes a huge difference. If other nations were to acquire F-16Vs, they would also face R&D costs."<sup>35</sup>
- The media reported that "workers from shipbuilding yards in Keelung" joined Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Tsai Shih-ying's campaign to support President Tsai Ing-wen's "indigenous defense submarine program to create jobs and facilitate the development of the nation's defense industry." The Legislator "promised that the main facilities for domestic production of the submarines would be based in Keelung Port." The government identifies CSBC Corp, having "shipyards in Kaohsiung and Keelung," to execute the program.<sup>36</sup>

## Maritime Cooperation

- The Taiwan-Japan Relations Association (TJRA), and the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association (JTEA) held the fourth annual dialogue on maritime cooperation on December 02, 2019 at Taipei. The dialogue, set up in October 2016, deliberated on maritime safety, scientific research, ocean environment protection, fisheries cooperation and other issues and themes of common concern. The TJRA head Chiou I-jen and the JTEA Chairman Ohashi Mitsuo co-chaired this meeting. The dialogue is quite comprehensive as several important and relevant ministries and agencies participated in it from both sides. It came into being "in the wake of a fisheries dispute in waters near the Japan-controlled Okinotori atoll in 2016. Japan detained a Taiwanese fishing vessel, the *Tung Sheng Chi No. 16*, on April 25 that year near the atoll." Thus far, MOUs on search and rescue missions, anti-smuggling work and scientific research have been signed under this dialogue mechanism.<sup>37</sup>

## Cyber Security

- The United States and Taiwan inaugurated their first-ever co-hosted international cyber exercises "to combat the growing number of global cyberattacks, especially those from North Korea and China." These exercises are designated as the US-Taiwan Cyber Offensive and Defensive Exercises (CODE) and termed as "aimed at strengthening domestic cyber defences and related skills and promoting closer international cooperation on cybersecurity." "Cybersecurity specialists from more than 10 countries, including Australia, the Czech Republic,

<sup>35</sup> Sean Lin, "Cabinet Finalizes Budget for F-16V Procurement," *Taipei Times*, November 1, 2019 at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/11/01/2003725046> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Jason Pan, "Shipbuilding Workers Back Submarine Plan," *Taipei Times*, November 23, 2019 at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/11/23/2003726345> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> Emerson Lim, "Taiwan-Japan Hold Dialogue on Maritime Cooperation in Taipei," *Focus Taiwan*, December 2, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201912020011.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

Japan and Malaysia” participated in the exercises.<sup>38</sup>

- Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) issued a warning of Chinese cyber-threats and advised “schools in Taiwan” to ensure “stricter cyber security practices after it was confirmed that computer systems at a local university were hacked, alleging the attacks were carried out by China.” Actually, the National Sun Yat-sen University has recently “confirmed that the e-mails of more than 10 scholars specializing in cross-strait studies at the school have been monitored for about three years.” It provided the details that “the IP addresses where network intruders logged on were identified as being located in the United States, China and Hong Kong. The targets of the hack were all professors specializing in political science, cross-strait affairs and Taiwan public affairs.”<sup>39</sup>

## Espionage

- Taiwan’s National Communications Commission (NCC) initiated an enquiry into the charges of Eastern Broadcasting Company (EBC), CtiTV and China Television Co (CTV) accepting funds from China. The enquiry was necessitated after the self-confessed Chinese spy William Wang Liqiang, defected to Australia on a fake Republic of Korea passport via Taiwan and confessed in an interview to an Australian TV channel “that part of his job was to infiltrate the Taiwanese media, temples and grassroots organizations to sway public opinion in Beijing’s favour” without specifying any particular Taiwanese media outlets, though later “*Vision Times*, a New York-based weekly newspaper, accused” the aforementioned media outlets in this connection. It should be noted that all three news channels have denied accepting any funds from China.<sup>40</sup>
- Following the claim made by William Wang Liqiang that he was recruited by China Innovation Investment Ltd.’s executive director Xiang Xin, the Taipei District Prosecutors’ Office detained and interrogated Xiang Xin and his wife, acting director Kung Ching, for about two hours, when they were about to board a flight at Taiwan’s Taoyuan International Airport. The National Security Act was invoked against them and they were “barred from leaving the nation.” Reportedly, Xiang, at the behest of the Chinese military, acquired “two listed companies in Hong Kong” at the time of Hong Kong’s retrocession, “which were to serve as top intelligence apparatuses in Hong Kong and Taiwan under the guise of the integration of civil-military development and communications.” His mandate was to “infiltrate Hong Kong’s financial markets and collect military intelligence.” William Wang also claimed in his TV interview that “China Innovation Investment Ltd. has injected funds into Taiwan’s media sector and established secret alliances with some television stations to give China control over them and censor the news.”<sup>41</sup> Xiang bought two units in the Kingdom of Global View apartment complex in Taipei’s posh Xinyi District for more than NT\$100 million (US\$3.28 million). This deal is under investigation now.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Emerson Lim, “First-ever US-Taiwan Cyber Exercises Open in Taipei,” *Focus Taiwan*, November 4, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201911040015.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Miao Zong-han, Chen Chih-chung and Evelyn Kao, “MAC Warns Taiwan Schools of Possible Computer Hacking by China,” *Focus Taiwan*, November 7, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/acs/201911070015.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>40</sup> Shelley Shan, “Spy Allegations: NCC Pledges to Look into Alleged Spy’s Claims,” *Taipei Times*, November 28, 2019 at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/11/28/2003726616> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>41</sup> Liu Shih-yi, Wang Cheng-chung, Chiu Te-chen, Lin Chang-shun and Elizabeth Hsu, “HK Firm Executives Stopped at Taiwan Airport amid Spy Probe (update),” *Focus Taiwan*, November 25, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/acs/201911250022.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Huang Chieh and Chien Li-chung, “Chinese Executives Grilled for Two Hours,” *Taipei Times*, November 28, 2019 at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2019/11/28/2003726599> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

- On the other hand, Chinese authorities arrested Shih Cheng-ping, who is a retired associate professor from the Graduate Institute of International Human Resource Development at National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU). Shih, on his trip to China, lost contact with his family in August 2019. Later, the media learnt that he had been “sentenced to a three-to-four year prison term on national security charges ....” Professor Shih has specialisation in econometrics, organizational behaviour, project management and strategic management.<sup>43</sup>
- A Taiwanese cyclist Tsao Yao-wen was “arrested, interrogated and held in custody there for four days on suspicion of espionage, during a cycling tour from China to Mongolia earlier this year.” The cyclist informed on his Facebook post that “he was arrested by Chinese soldiers on May 31 at the border between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, an autonomous region of northern China, on suspicion that he was spying for Taiwan,” by, as he vaguely recalls, the “3XX Brigade’s 12th Battalion.” Later, he was released when nothing objectionable was found in his possession.<sup>44</sup>

### Safeguarding Taiwan’s International Space

- In a notable development, a joint Taiwan-US business delegation visited Saint Lucia in the first week of November 2019. The stated purpose of the visit was “to increase private sector investment in the Caribbean nation.” However, its real importance was that it was the “the first time the two nations jointly embarked on a trade mission to one of Taiwan’s diplomatic allies.” Recently, in the aftermath of Taiwan losing seven diplomatic allies one after another in the last three years, the US has expressed concerns about China aggressively snatching Taiwan’s allies. The Taiwan Allies International Protection Act (TAIPEI) bill is under legislative process in the US Congress. The US held “a meeting with representatives from seven of Taiwan’s diplomatic allies in an effort to help the country keep its remaining allies around the world ... to strengthen cooperation between Taiwan and its allies in the Western Hemisphere through a wide range of measures to facilitate infrastructure, trade and investment, as well as how to safeguard democratic values.”<sup>45</sup> Around the same time, Deputy Foreign Minister Hsu Szu-chien met with David Stilwell, Assistant Secretary of the State Department’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. They discussed the prospects of “collaboration [among] Taiwan’s allies.” They identified the Pacific Islands Dialogue between Taiwan and the US set up this year in October, as the appropriate forum for this cooperation.<sup>46</sup>
- US Senator Ted Cruz is reported to propose soon The Taiwan Symbols of Sovereignty Act, or Taiwan SOS Act to “reverse a ban on Taiwanese diplomats and military personnel displaying Taiwan’s national flag [and wearing their uniforms] on US government property” and “while in the US on official business.” The objective is to “get rid of some US restrictions on Taiwan under its “one-China” policy.” More precisely, it intends to do away with supposedly confidential government guidelines from 2015, “that prohibit all symbols of Taiwan

<sup>43</sup> Miao Zong-han, Chen Chih-chung and Matthew Mazzetta, “Missing Taiwan Professor Receives Jail Sentence in China,” *Focus Taiwan*, November 1, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/acs/201911010017.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Yeh, “Taiwanese Cyclist Recounts ‘Horrifying’ Arrest, Detention in China,” *Focus Taiwan*, November 20, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/acs/201911200020.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>45</sup> Staff Writer, “Taiwan, US Officials Visit St Lucia on Trade Mission,” *Taipei Times*, November 8, 2019 at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/11/08/2003725468> (Accessed December 13, 2019); Staff Writer, “Representative Meets with US, Allies’ Officials,” *Taipei Times*, October 20, 2019 at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/10/20/2003724303> (Accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> Chiang Chinye and Chiang Yi-ching, “Taiwan, US Discuss Possible Collaboration in Taiwan’s Allies,” *Taipei Times*, October 22, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201910220008.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

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sovereignty from being displayed on US premises,” which “cannot be provided to the US Congress, but can be seen by Congressional staffers on a read-and-return basis with a US Department of State employee present.” The 2015 guidelines were issued in January 2015, in response to Chinese objections to Taiwan’s representative office raising Taiwan’s flag at Twin Oaks Estate, which is the former residence of Taiwanese ambassadors to the US. This was the first time when the ROC’s flag was hoisted in public in the US, since the end of official diplomatic relations in 1979.<sup>47</sup>

- Furthermore, “members of the European Parliament and three other national parliaments in Europe” established The Formosa Club “to support Taiwan in the face of China’s growing suppression,” as Taiwan’s foreign ministry remarked in the European Parliament on October 16, 2019. The Club “includes members of the Taiwan Friendship groups in the European Parliament and the parliaments of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom.” The joint statement by the Formosa Club stated that its objective was “to enhance cross-border support for Taiwan and to forge stronger ties between Taiwan, the European Union, and like-minded European countries.”<sup>48</sup>

## JAPAN AND THE KOREAN PENINSULA

### China-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Hosted in Chengdu

The eighth China-Japan-South Korea trilateral meeting was hosted in Chengdu, Sichuan on December 24, 2019. Commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China-Japan-ROK cooperation, the Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, Li Keqiang, the President of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in and the Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe outlined the Trilateral Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade.<sup>49</sup> The leaders agreed to enhance communication on strategic issues and political trust, in the spirit of mutual respect and managing differences. Complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula was one of the top agendas, where all three parties stressed that maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula as well as in Northeast Asia is a common interest and responsibility. In addition, the leaders pushed for synergising respective development strategies and working towards a free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment, and keeping markets open. Furthermore, the three sides agreed to enhance regional connectivity and infrastructure cooperation including in the areas of transport and logistics, to achieve sustainable development. In this context, the importance of economic, social, financial, fiscal and environmental sustainability of projects, and the necessity to support sustainable, high quality infrastructure in line with broadly accepted international principles to facilitate trade, investment and service competitiveness were stressed.

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<sup>47</sup> Staff Writer, “US Senator to Propose Bill to Drop Ban on Taiwan’s Flag”, *Taipei Times*, November 28, 2019 at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/11/28/2003726619> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>48</sup> Emerson Lim and Tang Pei-chun, “Parliamentarians in EU Launch Formosa Club to Support Taiwan”, *Focus Taiwan*, October 17, 2019 at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201910170007.aspx> (Accessed December 13, 2019).

<sup>49</sup> “Trilateral Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, December 24, 2019” at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/dbczrhldrhy/t1727418.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/dbczrhldrhy/t1727418.shtml) (Accessed on January 20, 2020)

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## Japan Orders Intelligence-Gathering Mission in the Middle East

As tensions escalate in the Middle East, Japan has discussed policy options beyond diplomatic engagement. On December 27, 2019, the Cabinet approved<sup>50</sup> the plan to despatch Self-Defense Force (SDF) intelligence-gathering mission to the Middle East. Subsequently, the Defence ministry on January 10, 2020 issued the dispatch order. This was followed up by diplomatic efforts as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the Middle East including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman from January 11-15, aiming to ease tensions and secure stable energy supplies.

The objective of the SDF mission is to guarantee the safety of Japan-related commercial ships as 90 per cent of the crude oil imports passes through Middle East waters. The scope of the mission covers Gulf of Oman, north Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden. P-3C Maritime SDF patrol planes are scheduled to start their mission on January 20 and the Takanami destroyer will begin operations in February. Any information gathered during this 11-month mission is expected to be shared with Japan-related vessel operators and the US.<sup>51</sup> In October 2019, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide confirmed that instead of joining the US-led maritime security initiative, Japan will opt for despatching an SDF vessel with the objective of information collection based on the defence ministry establishment law for the purpose of research and study.<sup>52</sup>

Safety of navigation around the Strait of Hormuz is critically important to Japan's energy security. In 2017, 87 per cent of Japan's imported oil was sourced from the Middle East and around 80 per cent of this is transported by tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. Earlier, in June 2019, two vessels, one of which was operated by the Japanese shipping company *Kokuka Sangyo*, was attacked near the Strait of Hormuz. The incident took place at a time when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was on a historic visit to Iran, the first such visit by a Japanese Prime Minister in more than four decades. The objective of Prime Minister Abe's visit to Iran was to urge Iran to play a constructive role in maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East.

## India-Japan 2+2 Ministerial-Level Dialogue

India hosted the first 2+2 ministerial-level dialogue with Japan on November 30, 2019 involving Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and their counterparts Motegi Toshimitsu and Kono Taro. It reflects the priority Prime Minister Modi accords to India's Special Strategic and Global Partnership with Japan, as Japan is the only country after America with whom New Delhi has instituted such a dialogue framework. It is essentially driven by the common strategic pursuit of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. The priority is to firm up the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). When concluded, Japan may get access to facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and India could get access to facility in Djibouti. Since maritime safety in the Indo-Pacific is a top priority, capacity-building in maritime security and Maritime Domain Awareness, including through cooperation with other countries, is important. In this context, India awaits a Japanese liaison officer to be stationed at the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR). Japan has shown interest in India's "Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative" aimed at building a safe, secure, stable, prosperous

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<sup>50</sup> "Japan govt. approves SDF dispatch to Middle East", NHK, December 27, 2019 at [https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20191227\\_11/](https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20191227_11/) (Accessed on January 13, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> "Defense minister orders SDF mission to Middle East, NHK, January 10, 2020" at [https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20200110\\_44/](https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20200110_44/) (Accessed on January 13, 2020).

<sup>52</sup> "Press Conference by the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, October 18, 2019" at [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/tyoukanpress/201910/18\\_p.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/tyoukanpress/201910/18_p.html) (Accessed on January 13, 2020).

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and sustainable maritime domain, and is open to discuss tangible cooperation based on the Initiative. On regional issues, denuclearisation of North Korea, developments in the South China Sea and terrorism, were discussed. Prior to this ministerial level dialogue, a relatively junior level 2+2 Dialogue (Secretary level) was in place as per the Action Plan to Advance Security Cooperation, agreed between the two countries in December 2009.

Before the upgraded ministerial level 2+2 meeting, Shigeru Kitamura, chief of Japan's National Security Secretariat (assumed office in September 2019) visited India and met Prime Minister Modi and External Affairs Minister Jaishankar to stress the growing depth of the strategic partnership.

### **India-Japan Maritime Affairs Dialogue in Tokyo**

The fifth round of India-Japan Maritime Affairs Dialogue was hosted in Tokyo on December 24, 2019<sup>53</sup> where both sides exchanged views on numerous subjects of mutual interest in the maritime domain and identified means for advancing maritime cooperation. The Maritime Affairs Dialogue is an important mechanism between the two countries for consultations on issues of mutual interest in maritime affairs. The focus was on firming up maritime security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, including Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), and Search and Rescue (SAR). The maritime affairs dialogue is established since 2013 wherein both India and Japan pursue common maritime security concerns, including non-traditional threats, possible areas of cooperation in shipping, marine sciences and technology, and marine bio-diversity.

### **Japan Plans Hypersonic Weapons' Development**

At the DSEI Japan 2019 defence exhibition in Chiba, the defence ministry stressed the importance of acquiring core technologies that help in the realisation of a stand-off defensive attack capability with hypersonic projectiles. This will be accomplished in two stages. In the first stage, the emphasis will be on the development of components and technologies connected to the weapon's warhead, airframe along with fire-control, guidance, and propulsion systems. In the second stage, stress will be on R&D results from the previous stage, to test and evaluate the weapon and its capabilities. Tokyo is presently developing two hypersonic weapons including the Hyper-Velocity Gliding Projectile (HVGP) and the Hypersonic Cruising Missile. It is expected to be used for island-to-island firing in the southwestern Nansei/Ryukyu Islands, which consist of the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea.<sup>54</sup>

### **Japan to Set Up Space Unit**

Japan will set up a space operation unit constituting of 20 personnel at the Air Self-Defense Force base in Fuchu City with the objective of monitoring satellites and space debris. This is in accordance with Tokyo's decision to focus on three new defence domains: space, cyber, and electronic warfare (EW). The Defense ministry has secured US\$ 460 million from the Cabinet in December 2019 for space-related defence activities and programmes, including the establishment of the space unit. There are plans to add to the number of personnel in the cyber-

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<sup>53</sup> "5th Round of India-Japan Maritime Affairs Dialogue, Ministry of External Affairs, December 26, 2019" at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/32240/5th+Round+of+IndiaJapan+Maritime+Affairs+Dialogue> (Accessed on January 13, 2020)

<sup>54</sup> Kosuke Takahashi, "DSEI Japan 2019: Tokyo outlines hypersonic weapons' development plan in Chiba", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 19 November 2019 at <https://www.janes.com/article/92664/dsei-japan-2019-tokyo-outlines-hypersonic-weapons-development-plan#.XdPedOhrbGU.linkedin> (Accessed on January 13, 2020)

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defence unit by 70 to approximately 290.<sup>55</sup> It is expected to work as a joint unit of the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces. In addition, there are plans for another unit consisting of 70 personnel to help in the deployment of a US-developed large reconnaissance drone, which will be based at the Misawa Air Base.

### **North Korea Holds Workers' Party Meeting**

In late December 2019, North Korea hosted an important meeting of the ruling Workers' Party to deliberate on "important policy issues for new victory".<sup>56</sup> Earlier, in the month, North Korea convened a meeting of the ruling party's central military commission and deliberated on vital organisational and political action and military steps to strengthen the armed forces. Important policy options and decisions were discussed during the session in the context of the stalled nuclear dialogue with the United States, and Pyongyang is reportedly considering taking a 'new way' if the US refuses to give concessions in their denuclearisation negotiations. Kim Jong-un presided over the meeting with a focus on building national defence. The plenary session emphasised on the struggle of the Workers' Party of Korea and key policy issues for a new victory in the revolution. Negotiation on denuclearisation has suffered a deadlock since the Hanoi summit between Kim Jong-un and President Donald Trump.

### **North Korea Appoints New Defence Chief**

Kim Jong-gwan is reported to have been appointed as the new defence minister. He has replaced No Kwang-chol as minister as he was named an alternate member of the Political Bureau of the North's ruling Workers' Party Central Committee during an important meeting in December 2019. This is reportedly the eighth reshuffle of the defence minister since Kim Jong-un assumed power in December 2011. Earlier in 2014, Kim Jong-gwan was appointed as the vice-defence minister. Kim has led important construction projects prioritised by the North Korean leader including tourism projects and a resort in Yangdok in South Pyongan Province.

Furthermore, reports also indicated that Ri Son-gwon, chairman of the North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification, was selected as North Korea's new foreign minister substituting Ri Yong-ho, who served in the position since 2016. Ri Son-gwon hails from a military background.<sup>57</sup>

### **North Korea's Rocket Engine Test**

The Academy of National Defence Science stated that on December 7, 2019 North Korea has conducted an important test at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground. Several assessments have been made that North Korea ground-tested a large, solid-fuel rocket motor designed for a notional intercontinental ballistic missile.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "Govt. eyes revising law to set up new space unit", NHK, January 26, 2020 at [https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20200126\\_04/](https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20200126_04/) (Accessed on January 27, 2020)

<sup>56</sup> "N. Korea holds key party meeting to discuss 'important policy issues'", Yohnap News Agency, December 29, 2019 at <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20191229000500325> (Accessed on January 27, 2020)

<sup>57</sup> "Kim picks eighth defense minister in 8 years", *Korea Joong Ang Daily*, January 24, 2020 at <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3073012> (Accessed on January 27, 2020)

<sup>58</sup> "Statement of Spokesman for Academy of National Defence Science Issued", KCNA, December 8, 2019 at <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1575768668-863049416/statement-of-spokesman-for-academy-of-national-defence-science-issued/?t=1575908815077> (Accessed on January 27, 2020)

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The largest Vertical Engine Test Stand in North Korea is located at Sohae. It has held several tests over the years, including static firings of the RD-250-type engine in 2016 and 2017.<sup>59</sup> Earlier, Pyongyang had set an end-of-year time limit for Washington to come up with proposals for easing of sanctions in the denuclearisation negotiation, failing which would lead North Korea to a ‘new path’. A week later, North Korea reportedly conducted a crucial test at a satellite launch site to increase its nuclear deterrent. This is in keeping with Pyongyang’s recently intensified weapons tests alongside rhetoric, as the denuclearisation negotiations failed to make progress.<sup>60</sup>

### **Japan’s National Security Council Gets an Economic Team**

Japan’s National Security Council has added an economic team with ten experts to monitor suspected intellectual property abuses and technology theft by China in addition to cyberattacks emanating from North Korea. The economic team will work at the National Security Secretariat alongside other teams including the coordination team, strategic planning team, intelligence team and another three teams dealing with regional affairs. This development unfolded as Japan barred Huawei Technologies and ZTE Corp. from getting involved in public procurement contracts as apprehensions regarding alleged espionage intensifies. Japan instituted the National Security Council in December 2013 with the objective of carrying out strategic discussions on several national security issues on a regular basis and as necessary.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Michael Elleman, “North Korea’s Rocket Engine Test: What We Know and Don’t Know”, *38 North*, December 10, 2019 at [https://www.38north.org/2019/12/melleman121019/#\\_ftn1](https://www.38north.org/2019/12/melleman121019/#_ftn1) (Accessed on January 27, 2020)

<sup>60</sup> “North Korea conducts ‘crucial test’ - state media”, BBC, December 14, 2019 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50792849> (Accessed on January 27, 2020)

<sup>61</sup> Japan’s National Security Council launches economic team focusing on China and North Korea, Kyodo, November 3, 2019 at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/11/03/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-national-security-council-economic-team-china-north-korea/#.XkOcfjEzbiU> (Accessed on December 28, 2019).

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

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