



China Reform Monitor 1358

January 22, 2019 **Joshua Eisenman**

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NEW NAVAL TENSIONS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

The PLA has intercepted U.S. warships sailing through the South China Sea. As part of a "freedom of navigation operation" (FONOP) intended "to challenge excessive maritime claims," the U.S. Navy deployed its Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, the USS McCampbell, into waters twelve nautical miles from the Paracel Islands, which are claimed by China and other nations. China's Foreign Ministry confirmed that the U.S. vessel entered the area "without permission from the Chinese side. The Chinese side immediately sent military vessels and aircraft to conduct verification and identification on the U.S. ship and warned it to leave. The relevant action by the U.S. vessel violated Chinese laws and relevant international laws, infringed upon China's sovereignty, and undermined peace, security and order of the relevant waters. We have lodged stern representations with the U.S. side." (*Newsweek*, January 7, 2019)

MILITARIZING THE BORDER WITH INDIA

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has equipped its troops on the Himalayan plateau across from India with new vehicle-mounted howitzers and light weight battle tanks. Both the tanks and the PLC-181 howitzer, which has a 52-caliber cannon, a range of over 50 km and shoots laser-guided and satellite-guided projectiles, were first deployed in Tibet during the 2017 border stand-off at Doklam. At about 35 metric tons and sporting a 1000 hp engine, the Type 15 tank is much lighter and faster than the PLA's other main battle tanks and is meant for the rugged and mountainous Himalayan region. To cope with soldiers' altitude sickness during training, the PLA has built oxygen stations in Tibet. (News 18 India, January 8, 2019)

IN HONG KONG, CRIMINALIZING DISRESPECT OF CHINA'S ANTHEM

Hong Kong officials are proposing a law that would make disrespecting China's national anthem a crime. The bill, which will be introduced in the city's pro-Beijing legislature, is modeled on a similar mainland law. It provides instructions concerning etiquette when the national anthem is played, and stipulates that all school children should sing it and to learn its history. Under the new law, insulting the anthem or playing and singing it in a distorted or disrespectful way would carry a HK\$50,000 (\$6,400) fine and up to three years in prison. Civic rights groups have lodged complaints against the proposed law, saying it could curb freedom of expression and education. The bill is in part a reaction to fans at Hong Kong's international team soccer games booing and turning their backs when the song was played. (*Wall Street Journal*, January 9, 2019)

XI'S PLAN FOR TAIPEI...

During a meeting with top Central Military Commission (CMC) officials, President Xi Jinping said Taiwan "must be, will be, reunified" with the mainland government, offered the island autonomy akin to Hong Kong and reserved "the option of taking all necessary means," including "the use of force." "All military units must correctly understand major national security and development trends, and strengthen their sense of unexpected hardship, crisis and battle. [They] must prepare for a comprehensive military struggle from a new starting point. Preparation for war and combat must be deepened to ensure an efficient response in times of emergency." (*Newsweek*, January 5, 2019)

...GETS A CHILLY RECEPTION ON THE ISLAND

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen pushed back on President Xi's remarks, saying it was "it is impossible for me—or in my view, any responsible politician in Taiwan—to accept President Xi Jinping's recent remarks without betraying the trust and will of the people of Taiwan." Tsai's set conditions for bilateral talks: China must "respect Taiwan's freedom and democracy, deals with the country on peaceful and equal terms, and communicate only on a government-to-government basis." Tsai said Taiwan "utterly rejects" the idea of "one country, two systems." According to a new public opinion poll, more than 80 percent of Taiwanese reject unification with mainland China under "one country, two systems" model already in place in Hong Kong and Macau. Of the 1074 Taiwan residents surveyed, more than 61 percent expressed satisfaction with Tsai's response to Xi, while more than 80 percent said they disapproved of Beijing's "one country, two systems" formulation. (Radio Free Asia, January 9, 2019)