



RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Changes to the Global Strategic Environment

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Energy Security; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Resource Security; Japan; Latin America; South Asia

THE STRUGGLE OVER OKINOTORISHIMA

Japan has filed an official protest over a Chinese ship operating in Japanese waters near Okinotorishima, a small atoll near the southern tip of Japan. Control over waters in the Philippine Sea has been a topic of contention for surrounding countries, especially as China pushes its territorial strength into contented areas. Okinotorishima is an island/rock, depending on who you ask, that holds strategic significance to Taiwan, China, and Japan. Japan claims it as Japanese territory, pouring some \$600 million into erecting steel breakwater and concrete walls the size of a small bedroom on the landmass. While the island itself may not provide much for human life, the waters and minerals surrounding Okinotorishima do – resources that are potentially worth billions of dollars.

But Japan is not the only one eyeing these resources, as both China and Taiwan hope to benefit from them as well. Both have contested Japan's claim, with China calling it a rock – significant because the legal status of Okinotorishima and therefore its ability to claim an economic exclusive zone depends on its classification as an island capable of sustaining human habitation or economic life. Japan claims that it can, and so should have the 200 nautical miles, but China and Taiwan disagree. (*South China Morning Post*, January 4, 2019)

SOUTH ASIAN FISHING DISPUTES ON THE RISE

On January 13th, Sri Lanka arrested about 20 Indian fishermen for fishing in Sri Lankan waters. Five days later, 71 fishermen went to Sri Lanka to recover the 14 boats that were seized. The fight over fishing grounds between the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka continues as fish in local waters become more and more scarce. The Palk Strait flows between the two territories and has historically been able to sustain both communities. However, as the number of Indian bottom trawlers continues to grow, more and more of the vessels are moving into Sri Lankan waters, depleting the stock of fish available to both sides. This illegal fishing by India is estimated to cost Sri Lanka in the neighborhood of \$41 million per year. About half of the 4,500 trawlers registered in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu depend on fishing in Sri Lankan waters. Their primary catch, prawns, are mostly meant for export to the EU, U.S., and Japan. However, bottom trawling destroys ecosystems, further adding stress to the fish that remain, and laying the groundwork for potential conflict between the two countries. (PTI, January 13, 2019; *New Indian Express*, January 18, 2019)

AMERICA'S SPIES WORRY ABOUT GLOBAL DISEASE...

The U.S. intelligence community's latest "Worldwide Threat Assessment," which was delivered to Congress by Director of National Security Dan Coats in late January, places emphasis on an ongoing global vulnerability to pandemic disease. This weakness, the report lays out, stems from varied causes, from urbanization to international travel and trade, as well as climate change. Furthermore, thanks to the lack of adequate controls in places with economic turmoil, the chance of these diseases proliferating is even higher as residents flee to more populated areas. (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 29, 2019)

...WHILE A SICK VENEZUELA GETS SICKER

The ongoing political and economic crisis in Venezuela is leading to a deterioration in the country's public health – with pronounced local and regional consequences. A January 2019 report by the University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG) identified 7,524 suspected measles cases in Venezuela—leading to 75 deaths—in the period from June 2017 to October 2018. The Venezuelan Ministry of Health last estimated the coverage rates for the second dose of the measles vaccine to be just 52 percent in 2017. Measles is a highly contagious virus that is spread through respiratory inhalation of infected droplets from someone who has sneezed, coughed, or even simply breathed. The virus can remain in the air for up to two hours after exhalation, making it exceptionally dangerous for highly populated areas. The virus is most hazardous to babies, young children, and the elderly, as it can be fatal.

Because of Venezuela's current, fraught domestic situation, authorities have had an increasingly difficult time ensuring that the country's population receives the necessary second vaccination for the virus – and sometimes even the first. This has made containment of the disease very difficult within Venezuela. But, the UMCG study notes, the consequences are much broader, with a resulting growth in measles outbreaks in surrounding countries. Moreover, because of malnutrition and deteriorating medical access, more and more people are fleeing Venezuela for surrounding countries and the United States, bringing the virus with them. The result is that Venezuela's measles outbreak has taken on significant international dimensions. (UMCG, January 30, 2019)