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SINGAPORE AND CHINA UPGRADE DEFENSE PACT, EXPAND JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES

China and Singapore have upgraded their 2008 Agreement on Defense Exchanges and Security Cooperation. Chinese Defense Minister General Wei Fenghe and Singapore's Defense Minister, Ng Eng Hen, signed the expanded deal in Beijing just ahead of China's annual security conference, the Xiangshan Forum, which Ng addressed for the fourth time in a row. The new deal includes frequent high-level dialogues and larger-scale military exercises involving the army, navy and air force. It also includes a new Visiting Forces Agreement, along with academic exchanges between military academies and think-tanks and a new hotline. Wei and Ng discussed further institutionalizing and scaling up joint army and navy exercises with a new mutual logistics support arrangement that is also in the works. The fourth instalment of Exercise Cooperation between the People's Liberation Army and the Singapore Armed Forces and took place in Singapore in July. Last year, as ASEAN chair, Singapore ushered in the first ASEAN-China joint maritime exercises. (*Straits Times*, October 20, 2019)

CHINA, SOUTH KOREA, HOLD FIRST "STRATEGIC" DEFENSE TALKS IN FIVE YEARS

For the first time in five years, China and South Korea have held high-level defense talks. The annual dialogue, launched in 2011, was suspended after the fourth installment in 2014 amid tensions over Seoul's decision to host an advanced U.S. missile defense system. The fifth China-South Korea vice-ministerial strategic defense dialogue took place in Beijing, led by Lt. Gen. Shao Yuanming, deputy chief of the Joint Staff Department of China's Central Military Commission and South Korean Vice Defense Minister Park Jae-min. The two sides agreed to work together to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula and to deepen bilateral ties between Beijing and Seoul. A bilateral meeting of the two countries defense ministers is now in the works, as are new hotlines between the Chinese and South Korean air forces and navies. Park (who is attending the Xiangshan Forum, along with 500 government officials and security experts from 68 countries and 7 international organizations) also met with Defense Minister Wei and "asked for China's help in making progress in the North Korea nuclear issue and the denuclearization talks." (*Yonhap*, October 21, 2019)

MANILA'S COAST GUARD CHIEF CALLS FOR JOINT RESOURCE EXPLORATION WITH CHINA

Vice Admiral Joel Garcia, the newly appointed Philippine Coast Guard commandant, has expressed support for joint exploration for resources in Philippine waters with China. Garcia said the conditions on the joint exploration laid down by Beijing would "definitely" benefit the Filipino people. "Almost all legal pundits will agree that the terms and conditions proposed by China are still within the bounds of our Constitution," Garcia noted. "And I would say that the Philippines would be better off to have that cooperation. How are we going to explore the vast resources we (own) with respect to the law of the sea (if there is no exploration?)." (*The Philippine Star*, October 22, 2019)

CHAIRMAN XI VISITS NEPAL, SIGNS MOUS AND PROMISES DISASTER AID

On October 12th, Xi Jinping became the first Chinese leader to visit Kathmandu in more than two decades. During Xi's visit, the two sides signed several MoUs, including two connectivity projects that the Nepalese government hopes will reduce its dependence on India. China will also give Nepal's army about \$21 million in unspecified "disaster relief materials" over the next three years. The agreement on disaster relief was signed by Nepal's Defense Minister Ishwar Pokharel, who is visiting China to attend the Xiangshan Forum, and his counterpart Wei Fenghe. After a devastating earthquake in 2015, which killed 9,000 people, China was among the first countries to send rescue and relief teams to Nepal. (Reuters, October 21, 2019)

NORTH KOREA OFFERED RARE EARTH MINING RIGHTS TO CHINA

North Korea has offered rare earth mining rights to China in return for a \$2.5 billion solar power plant to provide electricity daily to Pyongyang. "If a solar power plant is built to resolve the problem of power shortages, in return, we will grant rare earth mining rights in an area north of Pyongyang," North Korean officials told their Chinese counterparts in Shenyang, Liaoning. Specifically, they offered a rare earth mine in Cholsan County, North Pyongan Province. As ties between the two countries have improved, the North Koreans have increasingly approached Chinese officials with investment proposals. "On the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and North Korea, a Pyongyang trade representative with ties to the North Korean military visited Dandong, Liaoning, for discussions with the Chinese side. The two sides discussed phase 1 of an investment project," said an anonymous Chinese source. UNSC Resolution 2270, adopted in March 2016, prevents North Korea from trading in gold, titanium, vanadium and rare earths. (UPI, October 24, 2019)