



China Reform Monitor No. 1399

December 19, 2019 **Joshua Eisenman**

Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Africa; China; Middle East; Southeast Asia

CHINA AND ASEAN AGREE TO A SECOND MARITIME MILITARY EXERCISE

The ten ASEAN member countries and China have agreed to take part in a second round of multilateral naval drills. "We have agreed to conduct the second maritime exercise. However, we did not discuss in details when and where it will be held. The joint naval exercise is another effort by ASEAN and China to ensure peace and stability in the region," said Malaysia's Minister of Defense, Mohamad Sabu, on the sidelines of the 13th ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. Mohamad was also among those that attended the ASEAN+1 (China) Retreat. In October 2018, China and ASEAN countries conducted their first naval drills at the Zhanjiang Naval Base in Guangdong. (MalayMail, November 17, 2019)

CHINA EXPANDS MILITARY SALES TO AND COOPERATION WITH THAILAND

China has delivered the first of three deliveries of military vehicles to Thailand. The order, which is worth \$76 million, includes 34 VN-1 armored personnel vehicles, 10 VT-4 tanks, and five support vehicles. The second and third batches, which include 34 and 39 vehicles, respectively, will be delivered over the next three years. In May, the VN-4 "Rhinoceros" armored personnel carriers that China sold to Venezuela were deployed against protesters calling for the downfall of President Nicolas Maduro. The Thai Army, which received its 28 VN-4s in October 2017, has also purchased anti-ship missiles and rockets from China as well as a \$390 million submarine due to enter service by 2023. This week in Thailand, Defense Minister Wei Fenghe met with Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chanocha, who pledged to adhere to the one-China policy, contribute to the Belt and Road Initiative, and strengthen military-to-military cooperation with the PLA in equipment and technology, joint exercises and training, and multilateral security. (*South China Morning Post*, November 19, 2019)

CHINA AND SAUDI ARABIA LAUNCH JOINT NAVAL EXERCISE

China and Saudi Arabia have begun three weeks of joint naval exercises intended to enhance bilateral cooperation against maritime terrorism and piracy. The joint exercises, which are taking place at a Saudi naval base, come as tensions between Riyadh and Tehran have risen over the latter's attacks on oil tankers and a major assault on Saudi energy facilities earlier this Fall. Somehow, Beijing has maintained good relations with Saudi Arabia, which is its top foreign oil supplier, while also building strong ties with Iran. (Russia Today, November 20, 2019)

CHINA CHALLENGES ZIMBABWE'S BILATERAL ASSISTANCE DATA

China's Embassy in Zimbabwe has refuted figures presented last week by the country's Finance and Economic Development Minister, Mthuli Ncube, in his annual 2020 National Budget Statement. According to Harare, China's bilateral support to Zimbabwe from January to September 2019 was \$3.6 million. But the Chinese Embassy disagreed, claiming it actually disbursed \$136.8 million in bilateral support to the African country – a gap of over \$133 million. "According to our record, from January to September 2019, the actual bilateral support provided to Zimbabwe by China is \$136.8 million. Such a figure does not include the other bilateral supports such as the expense of expert assistance, Embassy's donations to local vulnerable groups and so on," read the Embassy's statement. (*The Herald*, November 20, 2019)

MALAYSIA ARRESTS 680 PRC NATIONALS FOR ONLINE FRAUD TARGETING THE MAINLAND

Malaysian authorities have arrested 680 PRC nationals for operating an online fraud operation targeting Chinese people in the mainland. The syndicate targeted victims in China by offering them high and quick profits and taking mobile payments via WeChat Pay. A team of 150 Immigration Department officers raided the suspects' well-guarded headquarters in Cyberjaya, said Khairul Dzaimie Daud, the director general of the Immigration Department. About 100 suspects managed to escape the premises where the gang had operated with impunity for about six months. (Reuters, November 21, 2019)