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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Australia; China; India ; Pakistan; Southeast Asia

THE LIMITS OF THE SAUDI-PAKISTANI PARTNERSHIP

Despite Pakistan's crown-jewel status in China's One Belt, One Road initiative, Islamabad is struggling to build consensus with other regional governments on its most important political and security issue: the disputed territory of Kashmir. On the one-year anniversary of India's designation of Jammu and Kashmir as union territories, thus upgrading their political status and reinforcing New Delhi's claim of sovereignty over them, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi bemoaned the lack of support from the Gulf States on this issue, particularly Saudi Arabia. "I'm taking a position despite our good ties with Saudi Arabia," Qureshi warned. "We cannot stay silent anymore on the sufferings of the Kashmiris." Pakistan has also threatened to convene a competing organization to the Saudi-dominated Organization of the Islamic Conference - one that, in Islamabad's eyes, would take a proper stand on the Kashmir question. For Riyadh's part, its silence on Kashmir is largely due to its bilateral trade with New Delhi, which dwarfs its trade with Islamabad by a margin of 7-to-1. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 13, 2020)

THAI PROTESTS CHALLENGE THE MILITARY-MONARCHY NEXUS

In response to an acute economic slowdown and political unrest, Thailand's traditional monarchy-military political complex is facing a populist backlash. Protestors, mainly students, have organized demonstrations in over 50 of Thailand's 77 provinces, calling for political reform and effectively challenging the institutions that define Thai political life. Their demands include the resignation of the sitting government, revising Thailand's constitution, and the cessation of harassing activists. More notably, several protestors have touched the "third rail" of Thai political culture by calling the monarchy itself into question. For Thailand's armed forces, the delegitimization of the monarchy threatens not only their hold on power, but also risks upending the established rhythms of successive military juntas that have served as a check on reformist elements for decades. Thus far, authorities have sought to disrupt the grassroots organization of protests on social media, but the largely decentralized demonstrations have continued unabated. A mid-August protest in Bangkok attracted 10,000 people, making it Thailand's largest anti-government demonstration since the country's 2014 coup. (*Financial Times*, August 27, 2020)

INDIA TAKES THE HIGH GROUND AT PANGONG LAKE

The border tensions between China and India, which began back in May, continue to simmer. Although military officials on both sides have engaged in deescalation talks, and political leaders in Beijing and New Delhi have created diplomatic space for a resolution, the stakes grow higher as the standoff persists. The most recent maneuvers took place at Pangong Lake, where China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) had previously blocked Indian patrols in June. In a secret nighttime operation, Indian armed forces took the high ground overlooking PLA troop advances. Over the summer, the PLA had fortified its position with structures and weapons, attempting to push Indian forces out of the contested area. The newly-secured Indian high ground, however, not only fortifies an Indian troop presence between "Finger 2" and "Finger 3" (two of eight outcroppings that surround Pangong Lake), but also blunts the PLA's advance. (*The Times of India*, September 3, 2020)

HUAWEI CONTRACT LEFT PNG DATA CENTER DEFENSELESS

A report recently commissioned by the Australian government is causing renewed headaches for Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei. After government authorities in Papua New Guinea (PNG) approached Canberra with financial requests for its underfunded National Data Centre, Australian due diligence revealed severe cybersecurity shortfalls in the facility that resulted directly from substandard Huawei equipment. The report documents Huawei's use of decades-old encryption software that is widely considered compromised throughout the cybersecurity field. The report plainly states, "Remote access would not be detected by security settings." This finding corroborates warnings that U.S. government officials have disseminated throughout European capitals over the past year over the dangers of partnership with the Chinese tech conglomerate. (*Financial Review*, August 11, 2020)