



Indo-Pacific Monitor No. 22

December 6, 2021 **Andrew Hartnett**

Related Categories: Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations

WASHINGTON, SEOUL ONCE AGAIN SEEK TO OFFICIALLY END KOREAN WAR

Recent reports indicate that the Biden administration is on the cusp of testing a new gambit in America's North Korea policy: officially ending the Korean War. While hostilities officially ended in 1953, the ensuing armistice fell short of a peace negotiation. South Korean President Moon Jae-in has long lobbied leaders in Washington to broach the subject of ending the war with Pyongyang, and has framed the step as being highly important symbolically and diplomatically. President Donald Trump reportedly considered this step as well, but denuclearization talks scuttled the possibility. Now, the initiative appears to be regaining steam from multiple parties, specifically China (another party to the 1953 armistice). Over the weekend, top Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi indicated to Suh Hoon, Moon's national security advisor, that Beijing would support the declaration. (*Politico*, November 23, 2021; *Korea Herald*, December 3, 2021)

ISRAEL AND INDIA ANNOUNCE 10-YEAR DEFENSE COOPERATION PLAN

News broke in late October of a new Israel-India defense cooperation agreement. The 10-year cooperation plan identifies new areas for bilateral defense cooperation, specifically defense procurement, production, research, and development. It also flows from a preexisting and increasingly robust defense relationship between the two countries. According to arms sales figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Jerusalem's weapons sales to New Delhi have regularly topped \$1 billion per year. The agreement introduces another consideration for policymakers in Washington, who are also watching India's commercial relations with Iran, as well as its defense procurement from Russia. (*Jerusalem Post*, October 31, 2021)

BEIJING LOBBIES FOR ASEAN TO INCLUDE BURMA'S JUNTA...

The aftermath of Burma's February military coup is proving to be a strain on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The principle of noninterference has long defined the bloc's approach to international relations – as well as member state relations with one other. But after the military leadership in Burma failed to follow through on a post-coup road map with ASEAN, other powers are beginning to intervene on Burma's behalf. In advance of an ASEAN summit on November 22nd, a Chinese envoy lobbied ASEAN member states to allow Burma's military ruler, Min Aung Hlaing, to attend. Given China's significant economic investments in Burma, its involvement in ASEAN is squarely in Beijing's interests. However, the Chinese proposal has encountered stiff opposition from Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore. (*Reuters*, November 18, 2021)

...WHILE BACKSTOPPING THE TATMADAW

The Tatmadaw, Burma's military, is facing challenges that go beyond diplomatic spats in ASEAN. The junta has seen a flight of foreign capital over the course of 2021, with key nations like Japan and Singapore curtailing their investments. Fortunately for the Tatmadaw, however, China is making efforts to fill that gap. Since the February 1st coup, Beijing has announced seven joint economic projects in Burma that buttress the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor – a key component of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While the Tatmadaw would prefer to avoid economic dependence on Beijing, the economic support has provided the regime with an important lifeline. (*Observer Research Foundation*, November 9, 2021)

INDIA-PAKISTAN FEUD DELAYS CRITICAL FOOD AID TO AFGHANISTAN

As Afghanistan spirals into a food crisis, the Taliban's benefactors in Pakistan have proven an obstacle to foreign assistance from nearby nations like India. In late September, New Delhi offered 50,000 tons of wheat to the Taliban as a humanitarian gesture. Even before the former government's collapse in August, Afghanistan was already prone to food insecurity. The political volatility over the past few months, however, has exacerbated the situation, with roughly 23 million Afghans affected. By some estimates, India's offer of 50,000 tons of wheat could meet 10% of Afghanistan's food needs in early 2022. Islamabad, however, held up authorization for the wheat shipments, which would need to transit Pakistan, for weeks. The episode is a microcosm of the gatekeeping role Pakistan plays for India's access to the Eurasian heartland. It is also the latest in ongoing spats between Islamabad and New Delhi. Of note, though, was the engagement of Iran and Russia in the matter, and their calls for Pakistan to open up its trade routes. In the end, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan indicated that he would "favorably" consider the shipment. (*New York Times*, November 13, 2021)