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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Military Innovation; Missile Defense; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Warfare; Border Security; China; India; South Asia; Maldives

SPECIAL ISSUE: RISING TENSIONS ALONG THE CHINA-INDIA BORDER

RISKS OF ARMED CONFLICT BETWEEN CHINA AND INDIA GROW: U.S. INTELLIGENCE

The U.S. Director of National Intelligence (DNI) believes there is a growing risk of armed conflict between China and India along their disputed border due to the strained bilateral relationship, growing troop deployments, and increasingly frequent military encounters. "The shared disputed border between India and China will remain a strain on their bilateral relationship. While the two sides have not engaged in significant cross-border clashes since 2020, they are maintaining large troop deployments, and sporadic encounters between opposing forces risk miscalculation and escalation into armed conflict," the DNI's new Annual Threat Assessment report lays out. (*The Wire*, March 15, 2024)

CHINA "DEPLORES" MODI'S VISIT TO NEW TUNNEL IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

"China strongly deplores and firmly opposes" Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent trip to Arunachal Pradesh state to inaugurate the new \$100 million Sela Tunnel there. At an altitude of nearly 4000m, the tunnel, which took five years to complete, will provide "all-weather" connectivity to the disputed Tawang region. "With a strong central government prioritizing national interests, we constructed this tunnel," Modi has said. PLA Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang responded that "the area of Zangnan is Chinese territory" and that Beijing "has never recognized the so-called 'Arunachal Pradesh.'" India's foreign ministry has retorted by saying that the region "was, is and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India." (*Nikkei*, March 12, 2024)

CHINA AND INDIA TEST MISSILES, RAMP UP TROOP DEPLOYMENTS

The PLA has conducted a live-fire test of an advanced surface-to-air missile system on the Karakoram Plateau, along the contested China-India border. At an altitude of 4300m, Karakoram is situated across from Eastern Ladakh, where China and India have been locked in a stand-off since 2020. Earlier this week, New Delhi tested the *Agni-5* intercontinental ballistic missile, which is equipped with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRV). Beijing and New Delhi have both increased their deployments to about 200,000 soldiers apiece along their disputed border. (*Newsweek*, March 14, 2024)

CHINA-MALDIVES INK MILITARY DEAL, INDIA BUILDS ISLAND BASE

On March 4, China and the Maldives inked a military assistance agreement to "foster strong bilateral ties." This week, 89 Indian military personnel left the country after a PLA delegation met President Mohamed Muizzu as part of a three-nation tour that also included Sri Lanka and Nepal. The Maldives' decision "to accept defense assistance from China is very significant and many observers see this as signaling a major tilt towards Beijing," says David Brewster of the Australian National University. Meanwhile, India last week opened a new naval base on the Lakshadweep islands near the Maldives – a move that is being seen negatively in China. "The base may pose a substantial security threat to the Maldives. It is also obviously aimed at China as it would strengthen India's control of the main shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean," Liu Zongyi of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies has maintained. (*South China Morning Post*, March 14, 2024)

U.S. SAYS ARUNACHAL PRADESH IS PART OF INDIA, CHINA SLAMS U.S.

"The United States recognizes Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory and we strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to advance territorial claims by incursions or encroachments, military or civilian, across the Line of Actual Control," a spokesman for the U.S. Department of State has laid out. In response, China's Foreign Ministry said: "The China-India boundary question is a matter between the two countries and has nothing to do with the U.S. side. Zangnan has always been China's territory, a basic fact that is undeniable. It is known to all that the U.S. has consistently spared no efforts to provoke and take advantage of other countries' conflicts to serve its selfish geopolitical interests." (*NBC*, March 22, 2024)