



CrisisWatch 2024 – August Trends and September Alerts

Asia

North East Asia

➡ **China/Japan** China maintained military presence around disputed waters and Japan and U.S. conducted bilateral military exercises.

Beijing maintained military presence around disputed waters. Japanese Defence Ministry Joint Staff Office 9 Aug released report indicating that Chinese electronic warfare drone flew within its Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over waters south of Miyako Strait after passing through contested East China Sea. Japan 12 Aug confirmed sighting 261 miles south of Miyako Island of Chinese navy strike group deployed to Philippine Sea; Japan 17 Aug also identified and surveilled advanced Chinese amphibious assault vessel and destroyer while pair sailed through Miyako Strait. Japan 27 Aug claimed Chinese military aircraft previous day unprecedentedly entered Japanese airspace, asserting incident was “serious violation of our territorial rights”. As of 30 Aug, 113 Chinese vessels were spotted in Japanese contiguous waters for 29 days and 12 vessels stayed in Japanese territorial waters over five days during the month.

U.S. and Japan conducted military exercise, China rejected such joint patrols. U.S. and Japan 7 Aug wrapped up 11-day annual bilateral exercise Resolute Dragon, which took place across Japan; activities aimed to bolster cooperation and focused on defence of south-western islands to counter Chinese military activity; notably, U.S. Marine Corps 12th Marine Littoral Regiment 4 Aug reported deployment of multi-mission radar system to Yonaguni Island for first time.

In other important developments. Japanese PM Fumio Kishida 14 Aug announced he will not run in presidential election of ruling Liberal Democratic Party slated for September. Chinese Foreign Ministry 22 Aug told press that Chinese prosecutors have indicted Japanese citizen on suspicion of espionage.

➡ **Korean Peninsula** U.S. and South Korea staged annual military exercise, while North Korea claimed to send nuke missile launchers to inter-Korean border.

U.S. and South Korea held major military exercise. U.S. and South Korea 19 Aug commenced 11-day annual large-scale military exercise, Ulchi Freedom Shield, aimed at strengthening combined response to defend against and deter nuclear-armed North Korea; approximately 19,000 South Korean troops participated alongside fewer U.S. and handful of third-country personnel; activities included variety of field exercises, live-fire drills and computer-simulated war games focused on countering Pyongyang’s missile and cyberattack threats. North Korea’s Foreign

Ministry 19 Aug condemned exercise as “provocative war drills of aggression” and “prelude” to “nuclear war”.

Pyongyang claimed deployment of nuke missile launchers. North Korea 5 Aug deployed 250 new “tactical ballistic missile launchers” to front-line units stationed on inter-Korean border; although weapons were unspecified, observers suggested images indicated erector launcher vehicles for Hwasong-11 short-range ballistic missile, which North Korean leader Kim Jong-un previously claimed could be equipped with nuclear warheads. Kim Jong-un 4 Aug presided over ceremony delivering weapons to military, stressing need to enhance country’s nuclear capabilities to counter perceived U.S. threats; 24 Aug oversaw test of new rocket launcher system. In report to parliamentary committee, South Korean intelligence agency 26 Aug cast doubt on Pyongyang’s ability to supply missiles to new launchers.

In other important developments. South Korean military 10 Aug spotted North Korean trash balloons flying south; 20 Aug confirmed suspected North Korean soldier was in “secured custody” after defecting to South Korea by crossing inter-Korean border on eastern front of peninsula.

➡ **Taiwan Strait Taipei’s allies, including U.S. and Japan, affirmed shared commitment to deterrence, while Beijing maintained high maritime and aerial activity around island.**

Beijing continued military activity as Taiwan held drills. Chinese Ministry of Transport 17-18 Aug patrolled strait for over 30 hours, reportedly to ensure safety of vessels, facilities and personnel during start of fishing season in China’s southern coast. Taiwan 20 Aug launched surface-to-air missile in live-fire drills conducted at Jiupeng Military base, southern Taiwan. U.S. destroyer 22 Aug made “routine” transit through strait; in response, China sent naval and air forces to monitor vessel. As of 30 Aug, Taiwan detected 556 Chinese military aircrafts round island, of which at least 402 either cross unofficial “median line” or entered Taiwan’s de facto air defence identification zone (ADIZ); notably, Taipei sighted 41 and 38 Chinese planes within ADIZ on 23 and 24 Aug respectively, highest of the month, which coincided with President Lai’s visit to outlying island of Kinmen. Taiwan identified 265 Chinese naval vessels in surrounding waters in August.

China released several Taiwanese amid cross-strait tensions. Chinese authorities 7 Aug released Kinmen-based Taiwanese army officer detained by Chinese Coast Guard from mid-March. China’s Taiwan Affairs Office and Ministry of Public Security 7 Aug added columns to official website listing names of “Taiwanese independence” secessionists, signalling resolve to pursue legal actions on these individuals; Taiwanese Mainland Affairs Council criticised list, saying that it only serves to further damage cross-strait relations. Beijing 13 Aug released four members of Taiwanese fishing boat seized in July, while boat and captain remain in custody.

Taipei’s allies, including U.S., Australia and Japan, showed support. U.S. and Australia 6 Aug expressed concern over Chinese military and coastguard activity. President Lai Ching-te 13 Aug received U.S. congressional delegation at Presidential Office, Taipei city; sides underscored shared democratic values and importance of deterrence. Japanese lawmakers 12-14 Aug embarked on three-day visit to Taipei to engage in talks with VP Hsiao Bi-khim on regional peace and security; President Lai

21 Aug received another Japanese delegation led by former PM Noda Yoshihiko, where Lai remarked that Taipei will “work hand in hand” with Tokyo to defend regional peace and security.

South Asia

➡ **Afghanistan** Taliban strengthened regional ties, including with Uzbekistan, and banned UN special rapporteur on human rights from country; jihadist group IS-KP claimed deadly attack.

Taliban authorities engaged in regional and international diplomacy. Uzbekistan PM Abdulla Aripov 17 Aug arrived in capital Kabul, first visit by any prime minister to capital since Taliban takeover. Parties signed 35 bilateral trade and investment agreements worth \$2.5bn. United Arab Emirates (UAE) 22 Aug confirmed Mawlawi Badreddin Haqqani as Taliban’s representative in UAE’s capital Abu Dhabi; while UAE does not formally recognise de facto Taliban administration, Haqqani’s appointment is significant for being only second of its kind after China accepted Taliban envoy in Jan 2024. Kazakhstan deputy FM Alibek Bakayev 22 Aug accepted Taliban nominee, Muhammad Ur Rehman Rahmani, as Afghanistan’s Chargé d’Affaires as sides seek to enhance bilateral economic and aid cooperation. Previously, Taliban’s prime minister office 10 Aug stated it sent 41 officials to China for professional training.

Authorities imposed travel ban on UN rights rapporteur. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid 20 Aug told local media that de facto authorities banned Richard Bennett, UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Afghanistan, from entering country, alleging “he was assigned to spread propaganda in Afghanistan”. Bennett next day criticised ban as “step backwards”, reiterated commitment to impartially document and assess rights violations. Taliban Emir 8 Aug issued decree announcing judicial punishments for govt officials who miss congregational prayers. Morality law 22 Aug announced codified Taliban social restrictions, notably limiting women’s rights and curtailing press freedoms.

IS-KP launched deadly attack. Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) 11 Aug claimed responsibility for explosion that targeted bus carrying Hazara civilians in capital Kabul; attack left one killed and injured thirteen. In another incident, six people 22 Aug died in mine blast in Dara Noor district.

In other important developments. Authorities 18 Aug held military parade at former U.S. airbase in Bagram, Parwan Province, to celebrate three-year rule; Chinese and Iranian officials attended. Central Bank 7 Aug doubled weekly cash withdrawal limit for individuals from \$1,000 to \$2,000, also raising monthly limit from \$3,000 to \$6,000.

⬆ **Bangladesh** After anti-govt protests prompted PM Hasina to flee country, calm returned as new interim government took over; scores of Rohingyas sought safety in country’s south east.

Amid heightened violence, PM Hasina fled to India. Anti-govt protests early Aug resumed after curfew was eased and internet partially resumed, leading to around 100 people 4 Aug killed during crackdown. As army refused to enforce curfew and protests persisted, PM Hasina 5 Aug resigned, fled to India. In subsequent days, several hundred more people were killed, many in reprisal attacks against ruling Awami League (AL) party supporters. Minorities, particularly Hindus, were also targeted, although most attacks seemed politically motivated – due to AL links – rather than religiously motivated.

Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus appointed as interim leader. Acting press secretary 7 Aug announced decision to name Muhammad Yunus as chief advisor after talks between student protest organisers, military leaders, and civil society actors. Interim govt 8 Aug took oath as Yunus appointed most diverse cabinet in Bangladesh's history, including student leaders, human rights activist and former diplomats. Yunus pledged to undertake “meaningful and deep reforms”, saying that free and fair elections would be held after interim govt fulfils mandate of carrying out necessary reforms. Thus far, interim govt has replaced heads of Supreme Court and Bangladesh Bank and detained former members of Hasina's govt for corruption and murder investigations; 29 Aug signed convention on enforced disappearances. While public optimism for interim govt is strong, Yunus faces considerable obstacles for reform without mandate to pass laws or amend constitution. Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party is backing interim govt but has called for timeline on elections.

Intense fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine state forced hundreds to flee. Arakan Army (AA)'s escalating attacks against regime forces in northern Rakhine state's Maungdaw town killed scores and prompted some Rohingyas to try and reach Bangladesh. Notably, drone attack 5 Aug killed up to 200 Rohingya civilians who attempted to cross Naf river into Bangladesh (see Myanmar). NGO Médecins Sans Frontières 9 Aug reported spike in arrivals of war-wounded Rohingya civilians from Myanmar; authorities 9 Aug said they recovered 34 bodies from Naf River after boat 6 Aug capsized.

➡ **India** **Leaked audio recording surfaced alleging that Chief Minister played role in fuelling ethnic tensions in Manipur, tensions with China over border issues persisted, and Maoist violence decreased.**

Chief Minister's role in Manipur ethnic conflict brought under scrutiny. Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO) 7 Aug published transcribed excerpts of audio recording in which Chief Minister N. Biren Singh allegedly supported using mortar bombs against Kuki-Zo community. Manipur govt same day denied allegation, calling audio “doctored”. Media outlet The Wire 19 Aug stated commission on inquiry for Manipur, set up in 2023, would investigate audio recording. Ten Kuki-Zo lawmakers 21 Aug asked for Singh's resignation saying recording established his complicity “beyond an iota of doubt”; Aam Aadmi Party 20 Aug also called for Singh to resign. Singh 29 Aug defended administration's record, dismissed calls for resignation; Kuki-Zo 31 Aug held large rallies asking him to step down. Meanwhile, insecurity persisted. Notably, Sapam Charubala, wife of former legislator 10 Aug died in explosion at home; unidentified perpetrators 17 Aug threw explosives into home of former lawmaker, Nahakpam Indrajit and 20 Aug fired five rounds from automatic weapons at college principal's home.

Relations with China remained tense, satellite imageries confirmed new 400-metre Chinese wall at disputed border. Chinese state media 1 Aug reported sides agreed to “consider each other’s reasonable concerns” pertaining to border issues in order to reach consensus as soon as possible; statement published day after media outlet NDTV 31 July revealed that China completed construction of 400-metre bridge connecting northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso on Line of Actual Control. FM Jaishankar 31 Aug said “India has a special China problem”, called for scrutiny over investments from China.

Maoist-related violence and anti-Maoist operations decreased. Maoists 20 Aug killed female cadre, Neelso alias Banti Radha, in Telangana state in border area with Chhattisgarh state, for being ‘covert operative’; attackers next day said Radha was killed for “betraying” party leadership by collaborating with police and had been removed as commander three months ago. National Investigation Agency 13 Aug filed charges against four Maoists after arresting them with weapons from Kanker district in Chhattisgarh.

➡ **India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Uptick in militant attacks in Jammu region continued, and govt announced regional elections after ten-year gap.**

Worsening security situation in Jammu continued to raise concern. Security forces continued to suffer losses in Jammu region, raising alarm with govt. Police 12 Aug arrested nine people for allegedly facilitating movement of militants infiltrating from Pakistan in upper reaches of Doda, Udhampur and Kathua districts, Jammu region; security forces 14 Aug killed one militant in Doda where one soldier also died. Militants 19 Aug also ambushed and killed police officer in higher reaches of Udhampur district. Recent surge in militancy prompted home ministry 3 Aug to announce deployment of two counter-insurgency battalion of Assam Rifles with soldiers stationed in upper reaches of Jammu region. Meanwhile, in Kashmir, militants 10 Aug killed two soldiers and injured two civilians in gun battle in Anantnag district; security forces 24 Aug killed militant during security operation in north Kashmir’s Baramulla district, and 28-29 Aug killed three militants in two different operations in north Kashmir’s Kupwara district.

Election Commission announced regional elections. Officials 16 Aug announced voting for Kashmir 90-member legislative assembly would start in Sept. Polls are expected to take place in three phases from 18 Sept to 1 Oct, with results to be announced on 4 Oct. Upcoming election will be region’s first in ten years, and also first polls to be held after Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) restructuring in 2019 as Union Territory. With expanded powers since July, Lieutenant Governor 16 Aug reshuffled nearly 200 middle and upper-rung officers in civil administration and police department; regional parties immediately criticised move, seen as “biased intent” to influence poll outcomes in favour of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Former J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah 16 Aug asked election commission to view such transfer orders from “prism of free and fair polls”.

➡ **Pakistan Former PM Imran Khan unsuccessfully attempted to mend relations with military as bilateral tensions with Kabul remained high amid persistent militant attacks.**

Relations between army and Khan plummeted further. Hoping to resurrect political prospects, Khan 5 Aug said it would be “foolish” not to have “excellent” relations with military. However, Khan’s relations with military subsequently further deteriorated. Military 12 Aug said it detained General (retired) Faiz Hameed, former general director of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, first ISI chief to be arrested, for “multiple violations of Pakistan Army Act post-retirement”. As ISI chief, Hameed was Khan’s close confidante and had reportedly overseen alleged rigging that brought Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to power in 2018. Military 15 Aug arrested three other retired officers saying investigations would continue against all accused for “collusion with vested political interests”. Meanwhile, parliament 7 Aug amended Election Act 2017 to prevent PTI from benefitting from 12 July court ruling that granted PTI seats reserved for minorities and women.

Insurgencies persisted in provinces bordering Afghanistan. Four soldiers and six militants 12 Aug died after clashes near checkpoint in South Waziristan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP); four soldiers along with 25 militants 28 Aug killed in KP’s Khyber district. In Balochistan province, series of militant attacks 24-25 Aug across several districts left at least 50 dead including civilians and 14 soldiers, paramilitary personnel and police; separatist Balochistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility. Counter-insurgency operations subsequently reportedly killed dozens of militants; notably, military 30 Aug stated five militants killed in retaliation in southwest Balochistan.

Relations with Kabul remained strained. Foreign ministry 1 Aug said UN sanctions committee endorsed Pakistan’s concerns about TTP and banned its collaboration with Afghan Taliban. To ease tensions, army chief Asim Munir 14 Aug asked Kabul not to “choose TTP over Pakistan”. However, tensions simmered after militants 18 Aug attempted to infiltrate into KP’s Bajaur district, killing three soldiers. Two days later, another Pakistani soldier died in armed clashes with Afghan forces in Balochistan’s Noshki area along disputed border.

➡ **Sri Lanka Sri Lanka prepared for Sept presidential elections, greenlighting 39 candidates; IMF warned country “at critical juncture”, should sustain economic reform.**

Record 39 candidates to take part in upcoming presidential elections. Electoral commission 15 Aug accepted largest-ever number of candidates, with 39 nominations, for 21 Sept presidential election, though the race is widely seen as a three-way battle between president Ranil Wickremesinghe, opposition leader Sajith Premadasa of Samagi Jana Balawegaya party and Anura Kumara Disanayake, leader of the leftist National People’s Power (NPP) coalition. Both Premadasa and Disanayake pledging to fight corruption and renegotiate bailout deal with International Monetary Fund (IMF) to better protect lower-income voters from economic austerity measures. In a blow to Wickremesinghe, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), expected to back the president, 7 Aug announced its candidate would be Namal Rajapaksa, 38-year-old son of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and nephew of ousted president Gotabaya Rajapaksa; move is seen as a bid by prominent Rajapaksa family, ousted from power in July 2022, to maintain political control of the SLPP, most of whose party legislators are backing Wickremesinghe. Wickremesinghe’s reputation took a blow after 22 Aug Supreme Court ruling found him guilty of “arbitrary and unlawful” conduct in postponing local elections, initially

due in March 2023, ordering govt to hold polls as soon as possible after the presidential vote.

IMF urged tax raise, commended progress of economic reform efforts. During 25 July-2 Aug staff visit, IMF commended economic reform efforts, but 2 Aug warned that country was “at critical juncture” and that to maintain economic stability and ensure efforts to reform economy are successful, authorities need to finalise debt restructuring agreements and redouble efforts to raise fiscal revenue. Next progress review is due after Sept presidential elections, outcome of which may influence policy changes. In line with 2023 Anti-Corruption Act, championed by IMF, president Wickremesinghe and 135 members of parliament provided declarations of assets and liabilities for 1 Aug online publication on Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery and Corruption website; 90 legislators out of 225, however, failed to meet 31 July deadline.

South East Asia

➔ **Indonesia** **Authorities blamed Papuan separatists for killing New Zealand pilot in Papua; authorities signed major defence deal with Australia.**

Police accused separatists for killing New Zealand pilot in Central Papua province. Security forces reported that separatist fighters 5 Aug shot dead male pilot from New Zealand when his helicopter landed in Alama village, Mimika district, Central Papua province, while releasing all four Indigenous Papuan passengers on board the aircraft. Killing comes nearly 18 months after the abduction by separatists in Feb 2023 of another pilot from New Zealand, Philip Mehrrens, who remains captive.

President held celebrations in planned new capital, thousands protested revisions to electoral law. Outgoing President Joko Widodo 17 Aug celebrated country’s 79th Independence Day in planned new capital Nusantara, carved from East Kalimantan Province on Borneo Island, amid concerns about construction delays and funding gaps. Widodo 19 Aug reshuffled cabinet in surprising late-term move that analysts say would bolster incoming administration of Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto, who won Feb’s presidential election, by positioning key allies to maintain continuity and counter opposition. Prabowo 19-20 Aug visited Australia on his first visit since Indonesia’s general election in Feb 2024. Thousands of people 22 Aug protested against proposed revisions of country’s electoral law to permit candidates under 30 years old to compete, clashing with police which arrested about 300 people; critics alleged that reform would boost Widodo’s efforts to further solidify power, for example by allowing his youngest son Kaesang Pangarep to run for provincial governor in Java’s local elections in Nov. Parliament same day decided not to proceed with proposed changes.

Authorities signed new Defence pact with Australia. Australia and Indonesia 29 Aug signed new defence deal, with provisions on “maritime security, counter terrorism, humanitarian and disaster relief, logistics support, education and training”, cementing closer ties between two countries.

➡ **Myanmar** Ethnic armed group captured military's north east command, military chief faced major criticism for loss, and Arakan Army (AA) pursued attacks on regime forces in Northern Rakhine, which could fuel more civilian violence in coming weeks.

Military lost first regional command in northern Shan state. Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and allies 3 Aug took control of Lashio town, capital of northern Shan State after launching attack previous month and just five days of heavy fighting on fortified headquarters. With more than 4,000 soldiers in MNDAA custody, Lashio's fall represents major blow to military as NE Command is first of 14 regional commands to be lost to ethnic armed group. Military 2 Aug bombed hospital in Laukkai city, Kokang area, northern Shan, killing ten civilians.

Military chief blamed foreign countries for fall, faced major criticism. Military chief Min Aung Hlaing 5 Aug addressed nation and warned about foreign interference, taking indirect aim at China without mentioning fall of Lashio. Nationalist monk Wirathu 8 Aug criticised Min Aung Hlaing, questioned whether he really wanted to win the war. Regime supporters also directed their anger at people of Chinese descent with anti-MNDAA and anti-Chinese pamphlets distributed in Mandalay city, along with threats to burn Chinese homes if city is attacked. Chinese FM Wang Yi 14 Aug stopped over briefly in capital Naypyitaw to discuss border security and protection of Chinese nationals, and investments in Myanmar.

AA continued attacks on pro-regime forces, denied deadly attack on civilians. AA launched fresh attacks against regime positions in Maungdaw town, as it attempts to force military out of northern Rakhine. AA 24-26 Aug said it recovered bodies of more than 100 soldiers and Muslim fighters; dozens more have been captured. Rohingya activists claimed AA for 5 Aug attack, which reportedly left around 200 Rohingya civilians dead; group denied involvement claiming to have evacuated more than 20,000 Rohingyas to north and south of Maungdaw. AA 30 Aug reported entering regime naval base, south of Rakhine's Thandwe city.

In another important development. Military 7 Aug struck Kachin Independence Army-controlled border town of Laiza, Kachin state, hitting two churches; Chinese forces fired warning shots in response.

➡ **Philippines** Bangsamoro peace process stayed on track despite occasional violence; govt forces continued to conduct anti-communist operations.

Local insecurity persisted in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Unidentified gunmen 2 Aug shot dead Roldan Benito, vice mayor of South Upi municipality in Maguindanao del Norte along with one of his security guards. Local media 6 Aug attributed incident to Benito's role as Teduray tribal leader in resisting unlawful appropriation of native land by armed non-Teduray persons; Bangsamoro govt same day condemned incident terming it "a stark reminder of the challenges we face in our region". Unidentified gunmen 18 Aug ambushed and killed village chairman and his wife in Sultan Kudarat town, Maguindanao del Norte; investigators suspected murder due to Mustapha's involvement in anti-drug operation which disrupted local drug networks. Meanwhile, Supreme Court 20 Aug ordered election commission to stop plebiscite

on BARMM which would have created two new municipalities in Maguindanao del Norte, and Nuling in Sultan Kudarat.

Anti-New People's army operations continued. Soldiers 5-8 Aug clashed with communist rebels, resulting in ten New People's Army (NPA) militant fatalities. Two NPA rebels 22 Aug died in gun battle with army. Clashes in Municipality of Valderrama in Antique province 24 Aug killed NPA rebel. National Security Advisor 14 Aug said NPA forces continued to plummet in numbers with only five remaining guerrilla fronts saying that govt aimed to eliminate NPA completely by 2024.

In another important development. Media outlet BBC 21 Aug reported ex-mayor of Bamban municipality fled Philippines after being accused of spying for China and having links with criminal groups.

➡ **South China Sea Confrontations continued around disputed shoals and opposing military exercises strained relations between China and the U.S. and its allies.**

Confrontations in the air and at sea strained deal between Manila and Beijing. Philippine military 10 Aug condemned "dangerous and provocative" actions of two Chinese Air Force fighter jets, which disrupted Philippine Air Force patrol over Scarborough Shoal by firing flares; Chinese military said operation was "professional, abided by norms". Near same shoal, Chinese Air Force fighter jet 19 Aug reportedly intimidated Philippine fisheries plane with flares. Hours earlier, Chinese and Philippine coast guard vessels collided at Sabina Shoal. Chinese island base 22 Aug fired flares while Philippine fisheries plane conducted routine poaching patrol near Subi Reef; Beijing insisted it implemented "necessary countermeasures" to protect its sovereignty. Chinese ships 25 Aug reportedly fired water cannons at Philippine fisheries enforcement vessel near Sabina Shoal; some 40 Chinese ships 26 Aug prevented resupply of *Teresa Magbanua*; Beijing 29 Aug day told Manila to "immediately withdraw" from Sabina Shoal. Earlier, Manila 13 Aug, and again 24 Aug, warned that aircraft incidents threatened temporary July pact with China to avoid confrontations during Philippine resupply missions, called on Beijing to stop "all provocative and dangerous actions". Beijing and Manila blamed each other for additional 31 Aug collision of coast guard vessels near Sabina Shoal.

Counter military exercises fuelled tensions. Manila and Tokyo 2 Aug launched inaugural joint military drills in South China Sea with two warships; Philippines armed forces stated that drills aimed to strengthen regional cooperation and realise "free and open Indo-Pacific". U.S., Australia, Canada and Philippines 7 Aug staged inaugural joint naval and air force exercises in South China Sea; Chinese military same day launched air and sea combat patrols near Scarborough Shoal. Philippine and Vietnamese coastguards 9 Aug held first joint drills off Manila.

In other important developments. Vietnamese leader To Lam chose China for his first overseas visit, signalling value of balancing close ties with its neighbour while it strengthens relations with U.S.; Chinese leader Xi Jinping 19 Aug held talks with Lam in Beijing. U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan 26-29 Aug visited Beijing for first time in such capacity.

➡ **Thailand Court disbanded Move Forward Party (MFP) as new PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, took office amid ongoing violence in deep south.**

Constitutional court dissolved MFP as over 140 MPs joined new opposition party. Constitutional Court 7 Aug dissolved main opposition MFP in unanimous decision; court banned MFP's eleven party executives, including party leader Pita Limjaroenrat, from holding office for ten years. Human rights groups and UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk immediately criticised ruling. Meanwhile, all 143 MFP MPs, who retained seats in parliament, 9 Aug joined freshly formed People's Party or "Prachachon", with tech entrepreneur Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut as party leader. Sec-Gen of National Anti-Corruption Commission Office 8 Aug said agency had ordered investigation of 44 former MFP MPs, including Natthaphong, for alleged breach of ethical standards by sponsoring bill to amend Article 112 of the Criminal Code.

New PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra elected unopposed. Constitutional Court 14 Aug dismissed PM Srettha Thavisin for ethical violations. House of Representatives 16 Aug elected Paetongtarn Shinawatra as new PM; Paetongtarn is widely seen as proxy for her father, former PM Thaksin Shinawatra. Royal Gazette 17 Aug reported decree that pardoned Thaksin for his 2008 conviction.

Deep south peace talks continued as militants staged attacks. Former PM Srettha 3 Aug met Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim in Sungai Kolok, Narathiwat province, on Malaysian border, reportedly discussed Deputy PM and Minister of Interior Anutin Charnvirakul's role working with Malaysia's security sector to end conflict. Narathiwat Provincial Court 23 Aug accepted case brought by families of victims of Oct 2004 Tak Bai incident, in which 85 Malay-Muslim men were killed. Meanwhile, low-level violence continued in deep south. Notably, security forces 1 Aug clashed with insurgents, killing three, in Khok Pho district, Pattani province; rangers on patrol 4 Aug detonated landmine killing one in Raman district, Yala province; security forces 8 Aug engaged in firefight with militant in Chanae district, Narathiwat, which left one militant dead; militants 9 Aug detonated three IEDs near Pattani Provincial Police Investigation Division, injuring nine police officers. Four assailants 11 Aug threw pipe bombs at Marine Corps checkpoint in Bacho district, Narathiwat, injuring one marine.

Pacific

➡ **New Caledonia (France) Isolated incidents persisted, killing one man.**

Clashes between security forces and rioters 15 Aug left 43-year-old man dead, and two injured, in Thio town, bringing total of those killed since early May to 11 people. Authorities during month maintained curfew, and other restrictions. High-level delegation from Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) mid-Aug postponed trip initially planned on 20 Aug to help seek resolution to political crisis; President of New Caledonia govt and pro-independence leader Louis Mapou 27 Aug agreed to visit, now planned for October. Pro-independence candidate Roch Wamytan 29 Aug lost

presidency of New Caledonia congress paving way for Veylma Falaeo, from local party l'Eveil océanien, to become first woman elected to this post.