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China's Naval Strength Gives It Crucial Clout in Negotiations around Asia

February 25, 2021 voanews.com reported: "China's increasing naval power, the country having surpassed the United States as the world's largest maritime force, is giving Beijing crucial sway in negotiations with Asian governments that dispute its claims at sea, experts say."

The U.S. Defense Department, in its September annual report to Congress on military and security developments involving China, said China's navy ranks as the world's biggest in numerical terms. The report calls the People's Liberation Army Navy an 'increasingly modern and flexible force' armed with 'modern multi-role combatants.'

China's navy has avoided war, a potential battlefield disadvantage, but its size means Chinese leaders can get their way in talks with other Asian countries, analysts in the Asia Pacific region say.

'It certainly doesn't hurt to have a powerful navy when you go into diplomatic negotiations and say, 'Give us what we want and then we'll think about what else we want,' said Malcolm Davis, senior analyst in defense strategy and capability at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in Canberra..."

Salafist group that called for sharia law, death of Jews banned in Germany

February 25, 2021 jpost.com reported: "Hundreds of German police carried out raids in 26 locations across Berlin and neighboring Brandenburg state on Thursday following the banning and dissolution of a radical Islamist group in the capital, authorities said."

Berlin's Senate interior department said it had outlawed Jama'atu Berlin, 'a young and very radical jihad Salafist' association, also known as Tauhid Berlin, saying the group was advocating terrorist attacks.

Nineteen members of the association were the focus of Thursday's raids and the group had been under surveillance for two years, Berlin Interior Senator Andreas Geisel told a news conference. A Senate statement said the group had propagated 'a martyr cult', supported Islamic State ideology, rejected the German constitution and called for sharia as the sole legitimate law..."

Whispers of \$100 Oil Return as Crude Shakes Off Covid's Clasp



February 24, 2021 Bloomberg reported: "While oil's dizzying collapse is still fresh for many traders, rumblings are starting to emerge that by the end of next year prices could once again top \$100 a barrel."



Azerbaijan's Socar Trading SA predicts global benchmark Brent could hit triple digits in the next 18 to 24 months, and Bank of America sees potential spikes above \$100 over the next few years on improving fundamentals and global stimulus. Speculators are also getting in on the action, increasing bets in the options market that oil will reach the vaunted level by December 2022.

The views are ultra-bullish, but they highlight increased confidence in the oil market after Brent rallied more than 200% after hitting an 18-year low during the pandemic. Demand has bounced back in key Asian markets, while OPEC+ is withholding barrels and a lack of investment is keeping shale supplies at bay. Goldman Sachs Group this week lifted its third-quarter forecast by \$10 to \$75 a barrel.

Option bets on oil prices rising above \$100 for the December 2022 Brent contract have jumped in recent days, with open interest on the calls rising from 500 to 3,950 in the past week.

The \$100 mark occupies a special place in the mind of many traders, as oil hovered around that level for several years in the early part of last decade as strong demand from emerging markets enticed drillers into ever more expensive locales, from deep ocean beds to Canada's remote tar sands.

That era ended in 2014, when U.S. shale firms proved they could pump massive amounts at far lower costs. But while the vaunted price level has been out of the market's reach since then, it hasn't been out of traders' minds. It was just a little more than two years ago that major trading houses made \$100 projections that ended up falling far short." ..."

Rocket strikes on US in Iraq seen as ‘message from Iran’

February 24, 2021 spacewar.com reported: “Renewed rocket attacks on US targets in Iraq show Iran-aligned factions are heaping pressure on the government while Tehran may be seeking leverage over America’s new administration, analysts say. Iraq, scarred by decades of war and insurgency, has been a strategic battleground for arch-foes the United States and Iran, both allies of Baghdad who remain sharply at odds over Iran’s nuclear programme.

Analysts and officials in Iraq say the resumption of attacks after four months of relative calm shows that Iran and its Iraqi allies are now abandoning de-escalation and seeking leverage over their rivals.

‘It seems we’re back to last year,’ a senior US military official in Iraq told AFP, referring to several months in 2020 when rockets rained down on American sites once a week or more...”

China Boasts of Military Buildup While Pushing ‘Dialogue’ with U.S.

February 23, 2021 Breitbart.com reported: “Chinese state media boasted of China’s massive military buildup over the weekend while simultaneously claiming Beijing wants nothing more than to renew friendly dialogue with the United States under the Biden administration.

China’s state-run *Global Times* reported Sunday that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has developed ‘a new type of training system that would improve military training in all respects, strengthen the capability to win wars and build the Chinese military into a world-class one.’

The *Global Times* did not discuss the system, approved by dictator Xi Jinping — whose many titles also include Chairman of the Central Military Commission — in detail, but the article hinted it would include some combination of real-world combat drills and high-tech simulations...”

Yellen Signals Interest in Backing Digital-Dollar Research

February 22, 2021 Bloomberg reported: “Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen signaled the Biden administration supports research into the viability of a digital dollar, a shift from the lack of enthusiasm shown for the concept under her predecessor, Steven Mnuchin.

“It makes sense for central banks to be looking at” issuing sovereign digital currencies, Yellen said at a virtual conference on Monday hosted by the New York Times. She said a digital version of the dollar could help address hurdles to financial inclusion in the U.S. among low-income households.

“Too many Americans don’t have access to easy payments systems and banking accounts, and I think this is something that a digital dollar, a central bank digital currency, could help with,” she said. “It could result in faster, safer and cheaper payments, which I think are important goals.”

A number of central banks, including the U.S. Federal Reserve, have been conducting research into how digital versions of their own currency would work. Officials generally see both opportunity and risks and many central banks have moved slowly to embrace the idea, while China has proceeded with pilot-program tests of a digital yuan.

“This is the most forward-leaning a Treasury secretary has ever been in endorsing a digital dollar,” Josh Lipsky, director of the Atlantic Council’s GeoEconomics Center, said of Yellen’s comments Monday. “I read it as an endorsement for Treasury to be involved in the exploration of central bank digital currencies, and we hadn’t seen that before.”

The U.S. central bank announced last year that staff members at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston were conducting research in conjunction with the MIT Media Lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts, seeking to construct and test a hypothetical digital dollar.” ...”

Israel: US paving path to Iranian nuclear bomb with push to rejoin JCPOA

February 19, 2021 jpost.com reported: “Israel warned that the United States was helping Iran develop a nuclear weapons arsenal with its decision late Thursday night to push to rejoin the 2015 Iran deal.

‘Israel remains committed to preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons and its position on the nuclear agreement has not changed,’ the Prime Minister’s Office said.

‘Israel believes that going back to the old agreement will pave Iran’s path to a nuclear arsenal. Israel is in close contact with the United States on this matter,’ it added.

From the onset Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had opposed the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known as the Iran deal, that was agreed upon between Tehran and the six world power powers; the US, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia and China...”



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